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## VOL 22 | NO 03



## ON THE COVER

Kenny Smith charges into a chute high above the Fraser River near Dog Creek, British Columbia. John Wellburn sniped this image last summer during a rowdy filming session for the "Going Hoff" video series.

## features

## 080 COMMON GROUND

A discovery mission on Kauai's lush tropical trails reveals the hardy group of locals who have brought mountain biking to life on the oldest of Hawaii's main islands.

## 096 TRUE BLUE

South Lake Tahoe might lack the refined exterior of many other mountain towns, but looks don't really matter on the high-country trails where the South Shore's true charm hides.

## departments

060 PILLAR

CE

# IT'S ABOUT THE RIDE



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## VOL 22 | NO 03

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## RYAN SALM

Photographer Ryan Salm calls the mountains around Lake Tahoe, California, home when he's not traveling around the world as an adventure and cultural photographer. A fierce North Shore/South Lake turf war has always kept Salm on his toes and fearful of stepping into the depths of South Lake Tahoe. As a staunch North Lake 'bro.' he has always wanted to infiltrate the South, but never quite had a good excuse. The opportunity to shoot the "True Blue" feature on page 96 was the perfect chance to go to the other side of the lake and cover the riding scene there. "The folks from TAMBA immediately took me in and treated me like one of their own," Salm says. "My goal was to soak up the biking culture in South Lake Tahoe. From the minute I arrived and throughout the summer months, I lived, breathed and pedaled the beautifully connected trails, and grilled steaks and shared beers with South Lake's best. The truth is, there is really no turf war, just a ton of awesome trails and a ton of great people trying to make Tahoe a better. more-organized place to ride."

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## GREG RANDOLPH

Greg Randolph is a born-again American who was raised on wild game and a strict Lutheran upbringing. After specializing in beer drinking and fraternity toga parties in college, he enjoyed a short-lived career as 'the next big thing' in road cycling. Subsequently, he raced cross-country mountain bikes for GT Bicycles, just as the glory days were coming to an end. His career there was highlighted by nearly learning to ride a wheelie and making ESPN's bloopers reel with an insane over-the-bars crash at a World Cup in New Zealand. Eventually, he hung up his last threadbare chamois for a less mundane life as an assistant night manager at a local Subway. Once the mighty pen behind the always-enlightening, occasionally controversial and rarely intellectual "Ask Chopper" column for Bike, he now spends his time updating his Facebook profile picture, polishing shotguns in front of his daughters' boyfriends and marketing the Sun Valley region of Idaho. Randolph documented Kauaian mountain-bike culture in the "Common Ground" feature on page 80.

FACEBOOK.COM/GSRANDOLPH



## **BRIAN VERNOR**

Brian Vernor is a filmmaker and photographer who grew up in Santa Cruz, California. For this issue, Vernor photographed Roxy Lo of Ibis Cycles for "Breaking the Mold" on page 56. "Roxy is a rare designer who has affected the way we expect carbon bikes to look and feel," Vernor says. "When I arrived at Ibis, Roxy and I discussed the story and her interview, and how the photography could support her words. We started with some obvious setups around the Ibis factory floor, and we talked about our respective bike histories. At some point, Roxy reminded me of the first time we met. at the Downieville Classic 10 years ago, when in a middle-of-the-night drunken confusion I tried to throw a TV down the stairs of the house where we were both staving. After putting me on the spot with that nugget of willfully forgotten personal history, I assumed we were on looser terms. At this point, I tried some different photo setups that required more faith from her. I think having a good laugh at my expense made her comfortable with me and my camera, and it helped lighten the mood so that her smile was more relaxed and genuine."

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SEA OTTER SHENANIGANS For those among us whose trails spend five months a year in the clutches of winter, the Sea Otter Classic signals the return of singletrack normalcy. Images of Pabstswilling, flag-waving spectators reassure us that the days of World Cup racing and after-work rides are not so far away. It's an orgy of repressed expectations: Energy levels among spectators are seldom higher, racers are trying to suss out the competition and brands are vying for the spotlight to be shined on their latest gear. We'll be covering the entire circus near Monterey, California, on bikemag.com.

CRANKWORX IS COMING You can also look forward to multimedia stories and videos from events like the new Crankworx Rotorua in New Zealand, as well as other singletrack adventures around the globe. It'll all be online, more readable and eye-pleasing than ever before.





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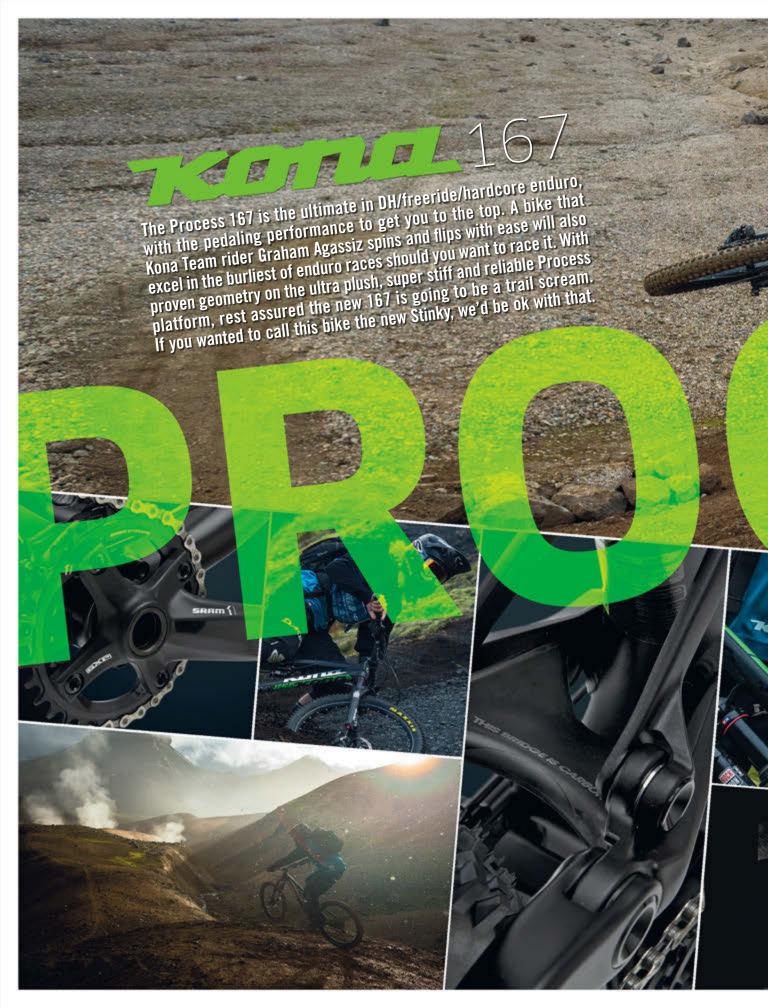
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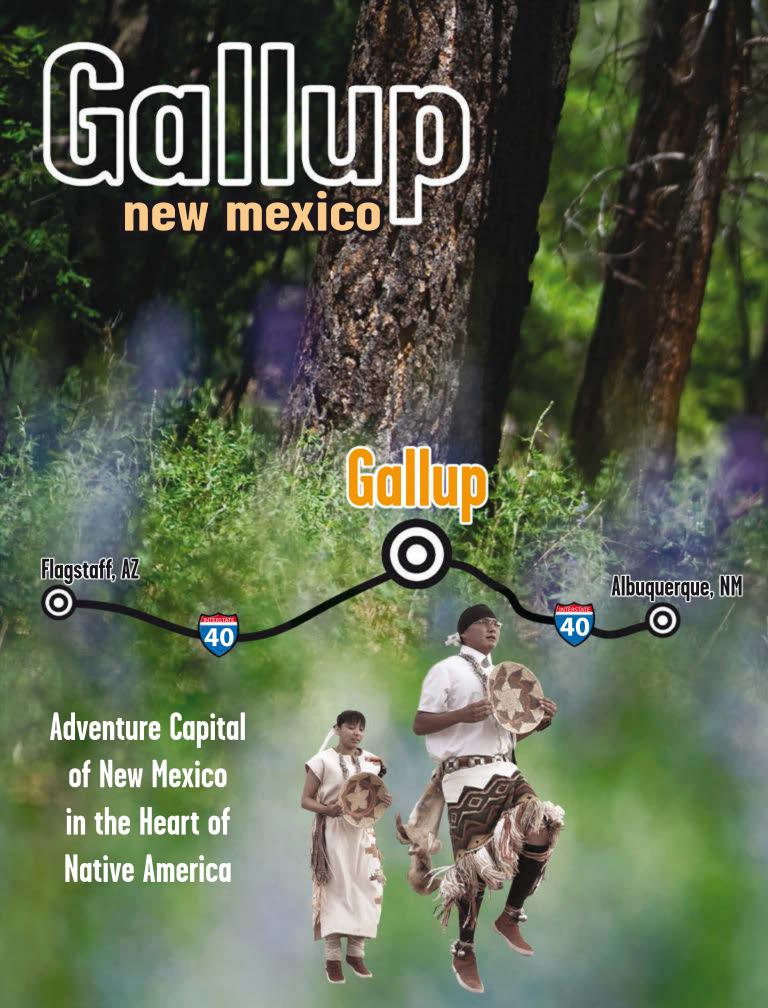
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## ties that bind

## FRIENDSHIP MIGHT BE UNSPOKEN, BUT IT'S ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD

AS A SORT OF 'OLD-SCHOOL' DUDE WHO WAS RAISED IN THE '70s and '80s by a somewhat stoic National Park Ranger father, it's usually hard for me to talk about soppy subjects like love or friend-ship—or any topic that involves 'feelings' or 'emotions.' For repressed, hard-nosed hacks like me, such matters feel so fundamentally important that they should be kept close to one's chest, and open discussions of these types of things in general company can come across as flaky or even downright insincere. So tackling the theme of 'friendship' in this column seems tantamount to stretching out on the proverbial leather couch and getting all Freudian with a shrink about how my first day of kindergarten continues to subconsciously haunt me as I resist the harsh realities of becoming middle-aged.

But the older I get, and the more experiences I survive, the more I realize how elemental friendship has been to everything meaningful in my life. When I strip out all the daily detritus of modern living, all the empty commercial crap and pointless absurdities of the rat race, friendship is one of the only things that matters.

Nowhere is this truer than in mountain biking, the fabric of which is practically woven with the fibers of friendship. While riding represents many things to many people, for most of us it embodies a strong sense of community, of shared adversity and triumph. Whether it's the lifelong bonds that are formed through multi-day wilderness adventures or the simple affirmation of crushing postride beverages with some buddies, friendship is a pillar of our all-consuming pursuit. Yet we rarely feel the need to talk about it.

Despite this, it remains one of our major strengths as a group, so we've devoted much of this issue to stories of mountain-biking solidarity. Our "Common Ground" feature (page 80) follows the unlikely trajectory of a tight-knit crew of islanders who have fought to keep mountain biking alive on the surf-centric Hawaiian island of Kauai. In "True Blue" (page 96), we explore how partnerships between once-rival factions in South Lake Tahoe, California, have sparked a surprising resurgence of trailbuilding, all on a foundation of friendship. Even if it's unspoken, it's always understood.



## MISSING THE MARK

Regarding the 2015 Bible of Bike Tests, it's a good thing that all of you can ride bikes as a vocation and/or hobby, because you don't have a future as marksmen. You missed the mark by such a margin that the barns of the world should have a gift basket and 'thank you' card en route. Allow me to elaborate.

The average price of the bikes in your 2015 Bible of Bike Tests is \$5,217.36, and that is not even 'as tested' pricing, as two of the bikes tested are only priced as "frame and fork." Are you kidding? Do you really suppose that the average Bike reader is shopping for a \$5,000 bike? Can you imagine what the local bike-shop landscape would look like if the average price of bikes on their sales floors was \$5,000? Think Chernobyl. However, that was not the only disappointment in your latest issue.

You tested 36 bikes, and the number of hardtails tested is roughly equal to the number of Pulitzer Prizes on your staff and in my household: zero. How in the world did you collect a stable of 36 test bikes and not manage to test one of, if not the, most

ubiquitous frame styles in mountain biking? That's akin to doing a 'Bible of Motorcycles' and excluding the Japanese motorcycles.

I will say one thing, and take it for what it is worth. This is not a 'Dear John' letter, and I do enjoy the writing and the bikemag.com videos by your staff. Heck, if I wasn't a fat boy getting back into mountain biking to get in shape so that I can ride some of the fantastic bikes in the 2015 Bible of Bike Tests. this would be perfect. You folks do great work and I don't want to see it go away. I just wish you gave a small sliver of focus to some 'everybody bikes.'

STEVE MARTIN; ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

First of all, Steve Martin, you seem like you're "A Wild and Crazy Guy" (and we bet you've been hearing that little quip since your comedian namesake's signature stand-up routine took the country by storm in the late '70s). What we don't understand is how a comedian of your net worth can't afford a \$5,000 mountain bike? And how can you be sure that we haven't been awarded any Pulitzers? To your point about the lack of hardtail reviews, check out our November 2014 issue. in which we reviewed four super-fun hardtails. We also regularly run hardtail reviews on bikemag.com, so keep an eye out for those as well. -Ed.

## **GOING DOWNHILL**

You've got to know this is coming, right? No downhill bikes in your 2015 *Bible of Bike Tests*? WTF? Are you kidding? So you think the all-mountain reviews cover downhill bikes, too? Tell

me it isn't so. Maybe next year you'll leave out the section on trail bikes? Or how about leaving out the fork reviews? I'm so confused. I look forward to this issue every year, but this time you really blew it.

JACKIE NEVELLS; BY EMAIL

Hey Jackie, we love downhill bikes, too. But given the fact that there are far more riders in the market for 5- and 6-inchtravel bikes, we decided to devote more space to them in this year's Bible. –Ed.

## **FALLEN SHREDDER**

Last November, we lost one of the good ones. Jonathan Yazzie, a Navajo shredder from Flagstaff, Arizona, died in a car accident in Telluride, Colorado. Jonathan, who was only 23

years old, rode like he lived: all or nothing! Two fists in the air and a huge smile on his face was the Jonathan way.

We recently honored him by riding the crazy trails on the Yazzie land where he learned to ride. His friends Simon, Chewie, Jason and I, along with his brothers, Terence and Jarret, rode hard, talked smack and yelled, "Jonathan!" while his mother watched. We ride because we want to, because we have to, because it makes us alive.

Jonathan lived and rode like very few of us get to: allout and all-in. And we're less without him. RIP, Jonathan Yazzie. Your smile inspired us all, and we'll never forget you. VANCE PETERSON; FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

## letter of the month

It's Super Bowl Sunday, and as the rest of the continent plops themselves down on their couch to 'partake' in the greatest sporting event of the year, I'm content to read *Bike* mag instead. I'll spend a couple of hours leafing through pages of foreign adventures and warmer climes in an attempt to pump myself up to leave the house and venture into the frigid Edmonton winter.

Even so, I can't completely avoid the Super Bowl media barrage, which, like most sports journalism, focuses exclusively on what professional athletes are doing. It seems to me that the entire point of this kind of coverage is to inform the viewer about what's happening on the television screen. Big whoop.

That's why I'm so much more content to be reading *Bike* mag. You guys focus on something that I might actually *do*: namely, go outdoors and *ride*. *Bike* mag isn't about which multimillion-dollar enterprises traded players in an attempt to increase ticket sales (and their bottom lines). It's about the experience of actually *riding your bike*. Articles about trips worth emulating, bike reviews about bikes that I might actually ride, and photos that inspire me to go for a rip provide a window into a more awesome world, rather than an extended guide to a television screen.

I'm sure that the other kind of sports journalism pays a lot better, but in my opinion, what you guys are doing is a lot more important. Thanks, and keep up the good work.

JEFF MAXWELL; EDMONTON, ALBERTA

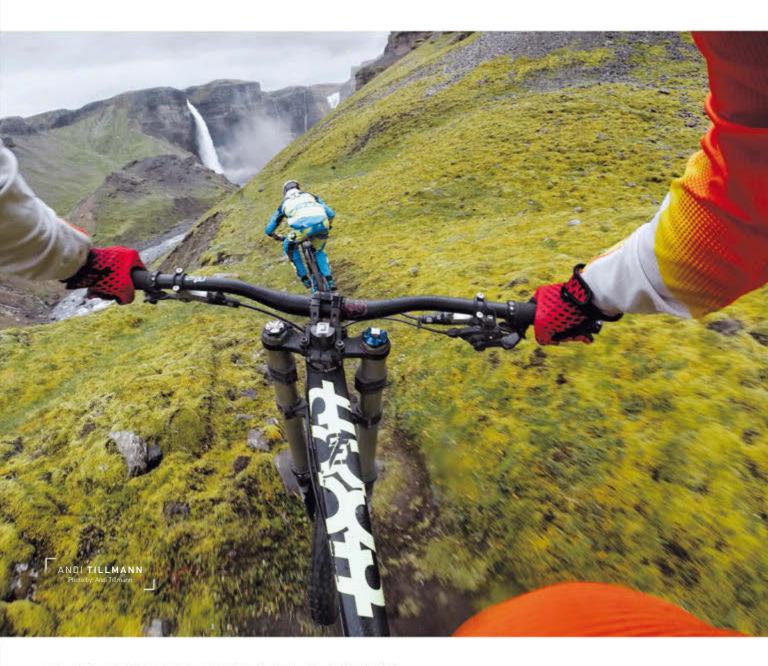
Jeff, we definitely share your aversion to the television circus that surrounds mainstream 'stick and ball' sports in North America, and we just realized that not a single member of our current editorial staff really cares who wins the Super Bowl. We're happy to hear that reading our magazine makes you want to get out and ride, because the goal of getting our readers out to ride guides every decision we make at Bike. We hope these sick new Belushki sunglasses by Shred Optics will keep you stoked while you're playing in the sun. –Ed.



## WRITE US

Bike welcomes your input, and we're suckers for cavalier use of the English language. Letters may be edited for length, but don't expect us to fix all your spelling mistakes, okay? Send correspondence to: Editor, Bike magazine, 2052 Corte Del Nogal, Carlsbad, CA 92672. Or send an email to: bikemag@email.enthusiastnetwork.com.





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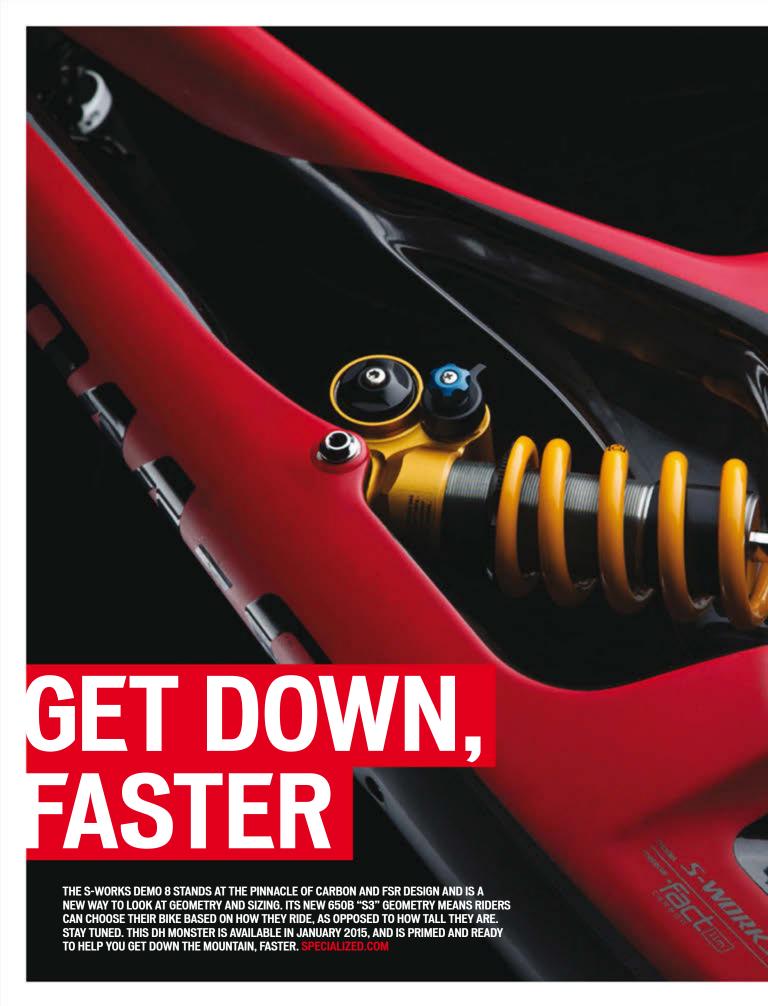


















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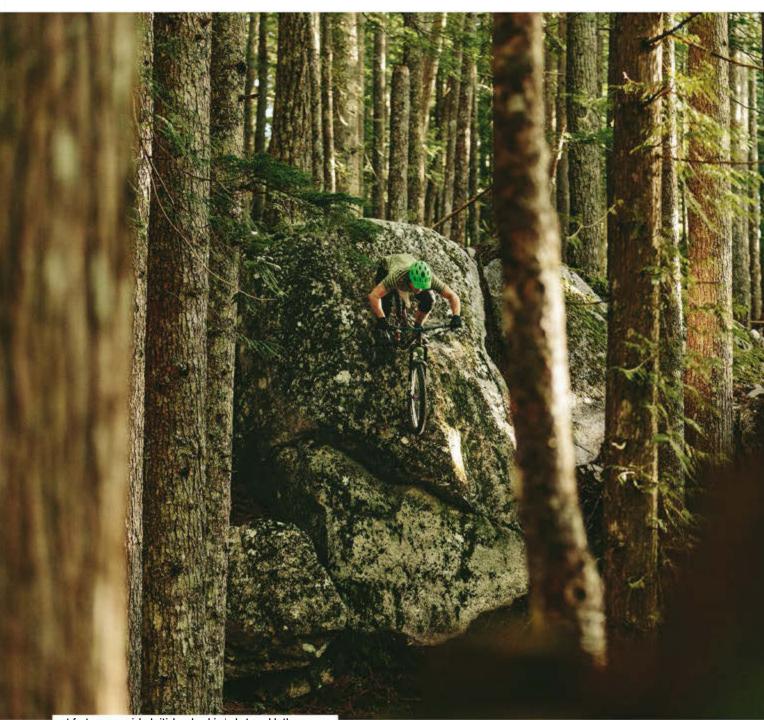












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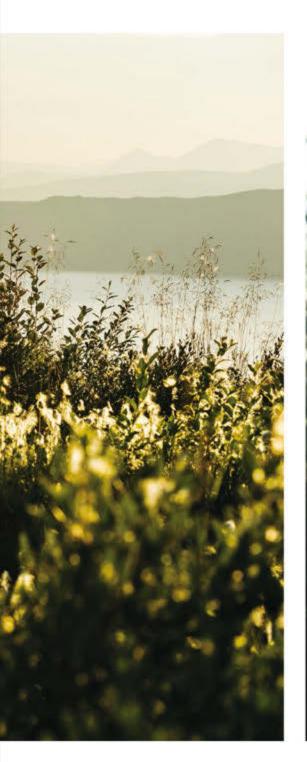
























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## no boone-doggle

#### A TRAIL REBIRTH IN THE OTHER PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST

THE MOUNTAIN BIKERS IN BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA, HAVE a Christ-like way of crossing a river without getting wet. But it's not a miracle; it's spatial awareness. They use their bikes to bridge the gaps between the rocks, anchoring the tires into the river, then using the pedal as a stepping stone—the missing link between exposed, dry rocks.

It's a key skill to have when you're riding Wilson Creek, a dank corner of Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina's High Country, where steep channels of dirt drop through rhodo tunnels and carve along the edges of river gorges. Creek crossings are obligatory.

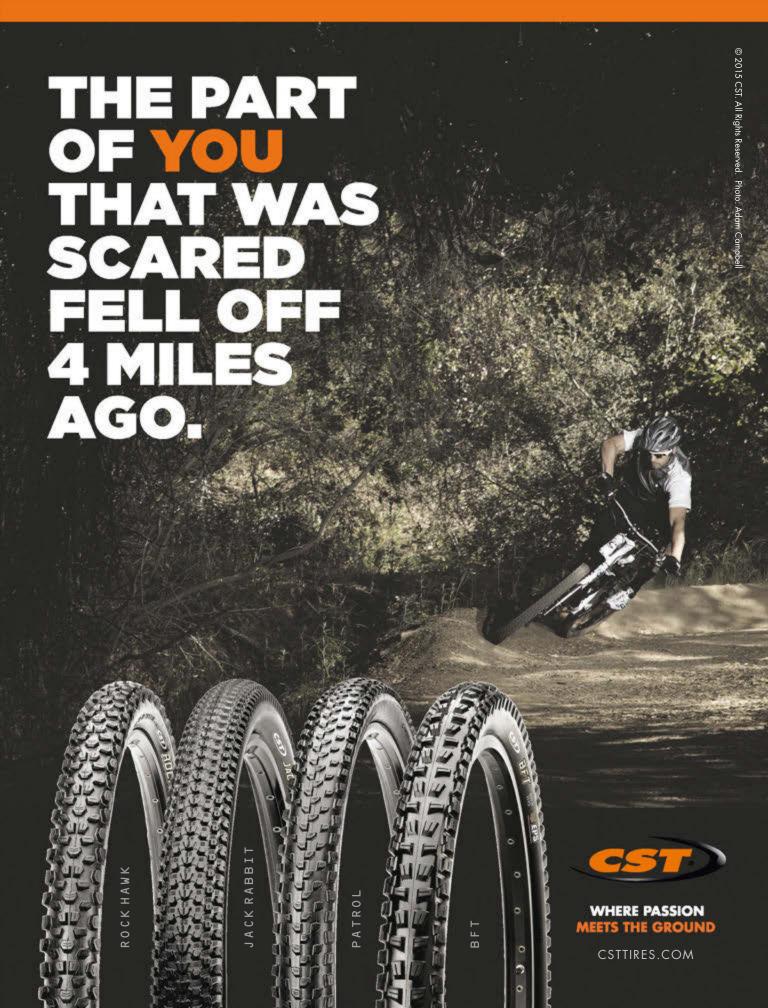
This isn't the well-known side of Pisgah National Forest–that would be the land between Brevard and Asheville that sees hundreds of thousands of rubber tires every year. Wilson, in the Grandfather Ranger District of Pisgah, sees a fraction of that traffic. This is the mysterious side of Pisgah, on the edge of the rugged Linville Gorge, where the Brown Mountain Lights have baffled locals and scientists for centuries (Google it). Where 40-foot-deep sinkholes add character to ridgeline singletrack–like traps in an Indiana

Jones movie. Where Confederate soldiers stashed hundreds of guns in a local cave, just in case the South *did* actually rise again. Signage is sporadic at best; cliffs and rivers are par for the course.

"You can still get way lost out here, and probably never run into another biker," says Ethan Anderson, a Wilson Creek regular for more than 20 years. He bagged 184 days riding last year, and is going for 250 this year.

Wilson Creek has a reputation for big, burly downhills, like Beehive, which throws mini-fridge-sized boulders in your way, or Sinkhole, which carves a beautiful bench cut that hangs onto the side of a steep gorge for 3 miles, demanding total concentration. Boone, home to Appalachian State University, is the closest 'city'—that's in quotation marks because the year-round population is 18,000. Boone's mountain bikers have a reputation for localism, and are notorious for keeping a lid on their favorite trails. Some have even gone as far as removing signs and giving bum directions to outsiders.

Ride Greentown–a jumble of water bars, roots and stupid-steep switchbacks that drops 1,500 feet in under 2 miles–and you'll un-





derstand why the locals would want to keep it to themselves.

"For a long time, there was no cohesion in the community here," says Kristian Jackson, the trail boss for the local club, Boone Area Cyclists. "Everyone was doing their own thing. Riders even resisted when IMBA showed interest in the trail system in 2002. Everyone here imagined groomed trails with the technical challenge pulled out by the root, and the club never got off the ground. If you're not from here, it can seem kind of closed off."

That should read, it *used* to seem kind of closed off. The High Country is undergoing a trail renaissance that has galvanized the local community while simultaneously opening the door to outsiders looking for adventure. With a new bike club and two new pur-

pose-built bike parks, Boone is more welcoming than ever.

"Everything changed with Rocky Knob," Jackson says.

Rocky Knob is the 185-acre bike park located just east of Boone's city limits that locals started building from scratch in 2009. The park gave locals a mission to rally around (a new club, the Boone Area Cyclists, was born to spearhead Rocky Knob's development), and gave outsiders an accessible piece of High Country singletrack. Today, Rocky Knob has 8 miles of purpose-built trail. It doesn't sound like a lot, but they've managed to pack a lot of variety into the system. Hook up Rocky Branch and Boat Rock and you're in for a 900-foot climb via a seemingly endless series of switchbacks. Between those switchbacks, the terrain oscillates between methodical rock gardens and whimsical flow. Stone Binge is a freeride area with a blend of boulders and wooden features-a tiny piece of Whistler in Dixie. 'OI Hoss has a mile of flowy berms and jumps, then there's the dedicated PBJ jump trail. Also a mid-mountain skinny park, miles of challenging cross country in between, and a new pumptrack

RIDE BOONE

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO | The Grandfather District of Pisgah is full of small Wilderness Study areas, where mountain biking is illegal. Be mindful of trail designations. Rocky Knob is signed well and even has skill-level indicators at trail intersections (rockyknob.wordpress. com), but signage in Wilson Creek is spotty. Bring a map and a GPS. Magic Cycles rents bikes (including downhill bikes at Beech; magiccycles.com).

CAMPING | Julian Price Campground sits at the base of Grandfather Mountain, near Price Lake on the Blue Ridge Parkway, with quick access to Pisgah National Forest (recreation.gov). And there's good primitive roadside camping in Wilson Creek at the bottom of Sinkhole near Highway 181.

WHERE TO STAY | Boone has plenty of moderately priced chain hotels that are just a few minutes from Rocky Knob. If you're looking to splurge, consider Westglow Resort, a palatial estate on 42 acres near Blowing Rock with an insanely decadent spa program. Think Gone With the Wind meets a yoga retreat. Westglowresortandspa.com

WHERE TO CELEBRATE | The Pedalin' Pig is owned by a mountain biker and offers down-home barbecue and an impressive list of local beer (thepedalinpig. com). Get the pulled rib sandwich and a side of slaw. Appalachian Mountain Brewery has a killer Blonde Ale with plenty of citrus, plus live music and food trucks on weekends (appalachianmountainbrewery.com). Beech Mountain recently opened a bar and brewpub at the top of the mountain for pedal-up brews. Get the 5506 Pale Ale (beechmountainresort.com).

near the parking lot. Think of Rocky Knob as one giant skills course prepping riders for the big bad they might encounter out in Wilson.

"We built Rocky Knob so everyone could learn to do a tabletop, or drops or jumps in a safe way," Jackson says. "The pumptrack is full of kids all the time. I can't wait to see what they'll be riding in 10 years."

At the same time Rocky Knob was being cut, Beech Mountain, the highest ski resort east of the Mississippi, reopened its lift-served mountain biking and slowly began piecing together a legitimate downhill trail system. Beech hosted the Gravity National Championships two years in a row, in 2011 and 2012. And it's only gotten better since then. Mike Thomas, a former collegiate national

champ from Appalachian State who turned his experience into a trail-building career, has been building out the eight-trail system and reworking older trails.

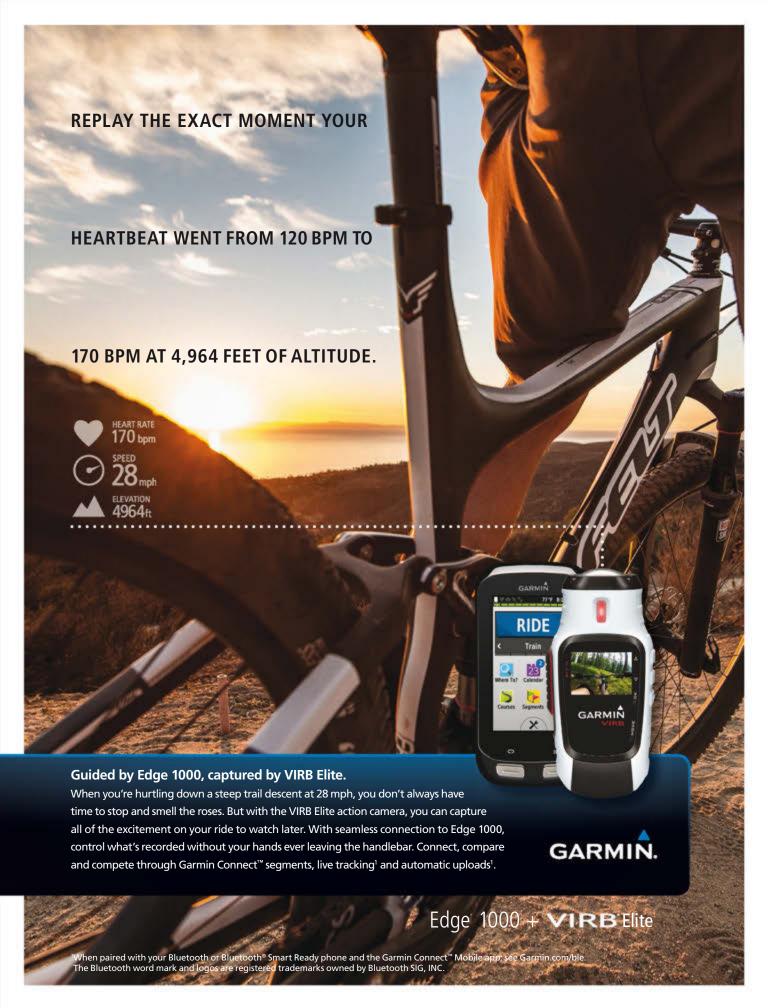
"There's nothing else like Beech in the South," Thomas says. "To have this down-hill park and Rocky Knob in the same town is unreal."

Now that both Beech and Rocky Knob are almost built out, locals are turning their attention back to their roots in Wilson Creek. A new IMBA chapter is dedicated to working in the Grandfather District, and is expected to sign a memorandum of understanding that would give them maintenance rights over the trails in Wilson Creek.

"We're not looking to build new trail," says Paul Stahlschmidt, president of the IMBA chapter. "There's so much potential with the legal trails that exist, but they're in such bad shape, they can't be ridden because they're too choked up."

Just don't expect the forest to get sanitized.

"There's still a sense of discovery in Wilson. We're still discovering old trails and creating new ways to link up rides," Jackson says. "That forest is so wild-nobody wants that to change. But we finally have a seat at the table and we're a part of the discussion now. We have a vision."







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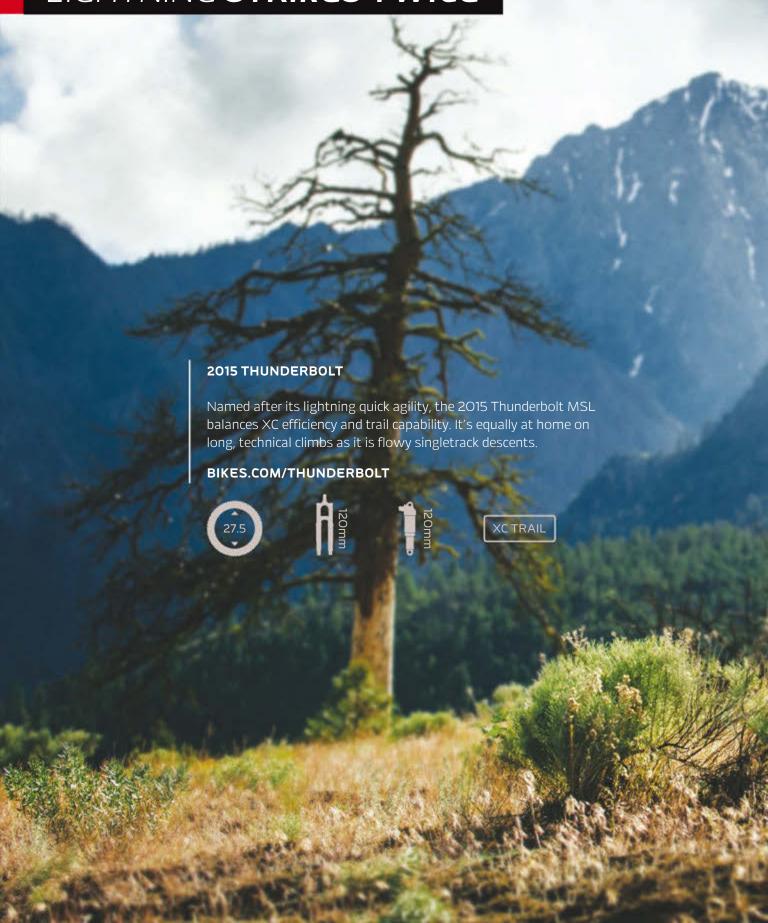


PINSTRIPE - ROCKET RED





## LIGHTNING **STRIKES TWICE**





# breaking the mold

### HOW ROXY LO'S FRESH DESIGN CHANGED THE BIKE INDUSTRY

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A BUSINESS CARD. Not the passing of one, but the designing of one. Roxy Lo didn't know it at the time, but the business card Hans Heim hired her to design in 2004 for Spokesman Bicycles in Santa Cruz, California, was a job interview—a test to see if she was capable of helping resurrect Ibis Cycles, returning the iconic brand to its former glory.

"I had never designed a business card before, but it was a good interview in hind-sight," said Lo from behind her desk at Ibis filled with computer screens, mirrors, a giant black cutting mat and a leather punch tool set. "At the time, I was working as a designer at Pottery Barn, and all I wanted to do was something other than high-tech and housewares."

Not only had Lo never designed a business card before, she had never designed a bike. And when Heim–partner of Ibis with Tom Morgan and the brand's original founder Scot Nicol–asked Lo to become the fourth partner and pen the shape of a groundbreaking dual-suspension, carbon monocoque mountain bike, the design would be a huge leap of faith.

"We basically gambled the entire rebirth of the company on the Mojo design," said Lo. "If the public didn't accept carbon on a full-suspension mountain bike, we would have been sunk. Fortunately, the pendulum swung in the right direction."

While Ibis certainly wasn't the first company to produce a carbon full-suspension bike—Trek, GT and Cannondale had all plowed that terrain before—Lo's reinvention of the Mojo changed the way people looked at long-travel mountain bikes. The Mojo was carbon from head to toe, offered 5.5 inches of travel and yet climbed like a goat. It also changed the public's perception of Ibis, transforming a brand known for classic hardtails and quirky full-suspension bikes to a company with a reputation for pushing the cutting edge of mountain bike design. Ten years later, the Mojo remains relevant.

"As a testament to its design integrity, we used the original Mojo molds for more than seven years, which is virtually unheard of. We still see demand for more 'Mojo-esque'-looking frames, so I think





#### 058/059 **SKETCH**

that speaks to the value of the original Mojo design."

Not only was the Mojo revolutionary from a design and capability perspective, but the way in which Lo and her colleagues created the frame was also unique.

"Suspension bikes to that point had lots of triangles that were designed by engineers," said Lo. "Aesthetics was just a happy coincidence. With the Mojo, from the outset we integrated design with engineering. Hans liked that I had no preconceived notions about how a frame should look and trusted my design sensibility."

The original design also served as a foundation for a succession of frames Lo has sculpted since, including the Tranny 26, Ripley 29, Tranny 29 and the recently released MojoHD3. With each project, Lo works closely with Heim, engineer Colin Hughes—the fifth Ibis partner—and suspension wizard

Dave Weagle, who continues to license his dw-link designs to Ibis.

"DW delivers the suspension layout in 2D, a sheet of paper that defines seat tube angle, headtube location, circles for the wheels and a few dots for pivot location," said Lo. "Then we take it to a 3D model while making sure all drivetrain components fit properly. This process is repeated about a dozen times."



It doesn't take long to realize how passionate Lo is about her profession. She is driven by designing and creating products that are relevant, desirable and enduring.

"If the product is only superficially marketed as innovation, but really not, I tend not to want to get involved," said Lo. "It's absolutely essential for me to know that my client or company values



the integrity of my designs through the entire production process."

When asked about the recent trend of female-specific frame geometry, Lo gave an equally insightful and candid response.

"We aren't a specialty frame manufacturer and we don't have the time or desire to pander to women with stereotypical colors, superficial marketing trends or model names," said Lo. "We sell to very savvy cyclists who do their math and research their purchases. Our customers appreciate that our bikes perform and are tested by a world-class athlete who happens to be female."

Of course Lo is referring to Anne-Caroline Chausson, the winningest mountain biker in history with 12 UCI Downhill World Championship titles. Chausson has been an invaluable resource for Ibis over the years, providing critical rider feedback to make designs better for both men and women. In a male-dominated industry, the innovation, imagination and dedication of Lo and Chausson are among the most significant in the history of the sport. Quite simply, mountain biking wouldn't be what it is today without the presence of these two remarkable women.

"We want our bikes to fit our riders like a glove and deliver the best performance possible. When those two things happen, people have fun, which is our ultimate goal," said Lo. "I have countless women who tell me they are so glad their bike fits and isn't specially colored or named to cater to their gender. We never exclude women when we make our models, so saying we need to consider making female-specific frames implies we don't already."

Although she is well known for her frames, Lo also has significant design involvement with Light & Motion, a light manufacturer

about an hour south of Santa Cruz. The companies are different in their design integration, but Lo's problem-solving mind works the same for both products.

"I enjoy learning about how things work, so it's definitely fun to dabble in lots of different types of innovations and technologies, especially when it results in a beautiful product that exceeds our expectations."

Lo believes strongly in a healthy balance between work, life and home, which for her is a 500-square-foot cabin deep in the Santa Cruz Mountains. And when it comes to projects that are mind -numbing and stress-inducing, Lo never lets herself get to that point. "I ask for help, work with my colleagues and build myself up for success, not stress. Of course, every project puts butterflies in my stomach before its release, but no matter how positive or negative responses are to my designs, I can filter the constructive points from the bullshit."

When asked what advice she has for women looking to break into the bike industry, Lo says don't hesitate to grab a broom.

"Be prepared to start off sweeping floors and know that even at the highest level, sweeping floors is not beneath you; it's part of your passion for the business. Dedicate your life to this sport and love it unconditionally. Promote positivity, don't pander to trends and surround yourself with people who inspire you and push you to be a more creative and dedicated person, no matter what gender. If we can bring more sensitive, thoughtful and passionate people into our sport, it will attract the absolute best talent and help our industry thrive."





## powder pit

THE TRACKS LAST FOR DAYS—SOMETIMES WEEKS—EACH LONG TAIL TELLING A DIFFERENT STORY. FROM TOP TO bottom, short, fast squiggles, long-trailing arcs or straight lines cut by beginners speak of speed and flow, friends and dogs, airs and bails. Ultimately, the wind and weather clear the canvas for the next storyteller.

The Barhartvale gravel pit in Kamloops, British Columbia, represents mountain biking's powder skiing. It's a magical place where the dirt doesn't hurt, and where the judge of risk and reward is gentle with her verdicts. The mountain of sand and rock rests on a slope as steep as gravity allows. Science says it's about 30 degrees, but it seems sharper from the top. The surface mixture is perfect—not so soft that you can't gain speed, but soft enough to crash and walk away.

Locals have been carving turns into the pit's gravel for decades. First, it was a brave few, then gradually more, their lines immortalized as ink on paper and pixelated on screens around the world, inspiring new generations of carvers.

The signature laugh of one of the first, Brett Tippie, can still be heard when the wind blows across the pit's face, carrying his voice across the valley. Or maybe he really *is* at the top, about to drop in. Either way, the magic of the pit is real. Anyone who has peered down from the top, stomach firmly planted in his or her throat while dropping in, can attest to the elation of completing a run and looking back up at the fresh tracks with hands still shaking from the adrenaline. The most common comment from riders at the bottom? "I could never get tired of that."



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#### by brice minnigh I photo: sven martin

## a racing career by the numbers

### ENDURO WORLD SERIES STANDOUT JEROME CLEMENTZ HAS A STAIRWAY FULL OF COMPETITIVE MEMORIES

FRENCH RACING PHENOMENON JEROME 'JEY' CLEMENTZ is the man to beat at any given Enduro World Series event. But long before Clementz started specializing in enduro, he was tearing it up in local, regional and national races-from XC to DH and even trials competitions-since he was 12 years old. And the wall of the winding stairway of his home in Buhl, France, paints a picture as vivid and varied as Clementz' racing career itself. "I think I probably have more than 120 number plates here," Clementz says. "When I started racing as a kid we kept them at my parents' place, and since I moved into my own place I've kept them all here." While there are plates representing virtually every discipline in mountain biking, Clementz is proud of more than just the sheer variety. "What I like most about the wall is that there are a lot of big races, but also a lot of grassroots races that weren't even sanctioned," Clementz explains. "There are a lot of local races, just fun races that we organized with friends and made the number plates ourselves. It's a mixture of everything."

#### #203 (LOWER LEFT CORNER)

The oldest number plate in Clementz' collection is number 203, from a French national race he qualified for when he was only 12. "The very first one is from 1996, for a national race in which four riders from each age group were picked to race as a four-kid team in XC, trials and DH," he says. "So this one is pretty special. Now though, if you don't start racing until you're 12, it's already too late."

#### #641 (NOT VISIBLE IN PHOTO)

"One of the most important plates to me is number 641, but I don't think you can see it in this photo," Clementz says. "It's from my first Megavalanche, which I raced for the first time in 1999. There was no seeding back then, and there were about 700 riders, and I was number 641. So I started the Mega in the back row. I had a very good start and worked my way into the top 20, and then I got a puncture. But I survived the glacier, and so at age 15 I was pretty happy. It was just a good experience to be part of this when you're a kid."

#### #199 (TOP LEFT OF FAR WALL)

"Another one of my favorites is number 199, a Red Bull plate," he says. "This was the first time I ever won a Red Bull event, the Red Bull Trailfox in Switzerland back in 2008. It was a three-day event: One DH by night, one race on North Shore-style skinnies and wooden bridges and stuff, a pumptrack

race and a mass-start enduro. And they combined the points from all the races to pick the winner. This time I beat René Wildhaber, who was already a Red Bull athlete and was winning this race for three years already. It felt great. But René was pissed and the next year he took his revenge and beat me." Still, it was a watershed moment in Clementz' racing trajectory. "When you grow up watching races, a Red Bull event is kind of a must, and to win a Red Bull event was kind of a dream for me."

#### #115 (TOP MIDDLE, LEFT WALL)

"I also really like number 115, which is from the World Championships in Kaprun, Austria, in 2002," Clementz says. "It is the only UCI World Championship I have done, so it's kind of cool. I raced DH. That was the last title of Nicolas Voillouz."

#### ENDURO WORLD SERIES

"In this picture you can't see all of the EWS plates because they go around down the stairs, but I've kept all of them because enduro racing is really important to me," Clementz explains. "Before the Enduro World Series you'd go to races and not all of the world's top riders would be there. But now we can race against the best riders at all of the races. And though all the EWS racers are serious and competitive and want to win, after the races everyone is always really supportive no matter who wins."

### first in freeride

#### THE VERSATILE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PIPELINE ROCKED THE GRAVITY WORLD

THERE IS NO SINGLE, ARCHETYPAL CROSS-COUNTRY bike. Likewise, there is no extra-squishy bike that can be called the definitive blueprint for the modern downhill bike. And yet, when it comes to freeride, one bike is often cited as the genesis, the mechanical Adam and Eve, and that bike is the 1998 Rocky Mountain Pipeline. This, of course, is ludicrous. Rocky Mountain didn't even coin the term 'freeride.' Moreover, there were already scads of long-travel bikes on the market. So why does the Pipeline frequently get credited for kicking off the revolution?

"Because we were riding it!" exclaims Brett Tippie with his trademark cackle. By "we," Tippie of course means the Rocky Mountain Fro Riders—a trio of ridiculously talented riders from British Columbia who were paid by Rocky Mountain Bicycles to ride scary terrain and make near-death experiences look surprisingly fun. Today, that's the sponsorship norm, but at the time, the spectacle dropped jaws around the world. The Fro Riders and their bike, the Pipeline, were an overnight sensation, thanks to their appearance in countless magazines and in "Kranked," mountain biking's first freeride porn video.

Today, the Pipeline seems crude—a unified rear triangle bike that morphed into a heavy hardtail whenever you stood on the pedals, which is to say, whenever you were actually descending. But 'cutting edge' is a relative thing. When the Pipeline debuted, it was ahead of its time. Many of 1998's 'freeride' bikes sported an underwhelming 4 inches of rear suspension. Companies tried to make up for this shortcoming by bolting on DH-style, triple-crown forks

that also eked out a meager 4 inches of squish and made already-portly bikes that much clumsier. The Pipeline, however, twisted the dial to 11, so to speak, with a whopping 6 inches of rear suspension and a Marzocchi Bomber Z1 single-crown fork that made other long-travel forks of the day obsolete.

But that's still not why we remember this bike.

"It was versatile," explains Wade Simmons, a former Fro Rider and the 'Godfather of Freeride.' "The Pipeline was the first freeride bike you could actually pedal up big mountains. Before the Pipeline, we just pushed our 'big' bikes up the trail. On the Pipeline, you could reach down, open up the quick-release lever, put the bike into 4-inch mode and climb to the top. And when it was time to shred, you opened up that quick-release and put it in 6-inch mode."

That single feature—an on-the-fly, suspension-travel adjuster—was a bold statement all by itself. Before the Pipeline, bikes were either lightweight climbers that scared you witless on technical descents or they were behemoth DH sleds that accessorized well with chairlifts but were hell to trail ride on. The Pipeline flipped the bird at the dominant this-or-that paradigm. You were now free to ride anywhere and anyhow you saw fit—on one bike.

The Pipeline may not truly be the first freeride bike, but it was the first bike that burst out of the closet screaming, "I'm freeride and proud." It's imbike like that.





### sacred soil

NOVEMBER 3, 2014 | 7:43 AM | EILAT, ISRAEL

WHEN WHISTLER, B.C. PHOTOGRAPHER REUBEN KRABBE TOOK THIS SUNRISE SHOT OF DYLAN SHERRARD PUMPING the pavement at Kibbutz Samar near the southern tip of Israel, he also captured a glimpse of the country's cultural dynamic.

Communal societies are commonplace in Israel, where some 270 collectivist communities—or kibbutzim—sprawl throughout the small country. But unlike some others, at Kibbutz Samar residents relish the opportunity to profit from a business of their choosing instead of being required to work in the communal business.

Samar also happens to be in a prime location for mountain biking, due to its proximity to the trails of Timna Valley's redrock stone and the vast, barren landscape of the Negev Desert. The combination of these two factors compelled the Kibbutz to open a bike hotel and tour operation, leading tourists on singletrack adventures throughout the Holy Land. Members of the settlement also build trails, and poured this pavement pumptrack on the front lawn of Kibbutz Samar.

The barbed wire in the background of the image marks the edge of the kibbutz property, separating it from the neighboring nature reserve and the Jordanian border less than 2 miles away. The fence also serves to protect residents from potential violence—a reality of life in one of the world's most complicated and, at times, tumultuous political landscapes.



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#### LESSONS FROM AN UNLIKELY TRAIL BUILDER

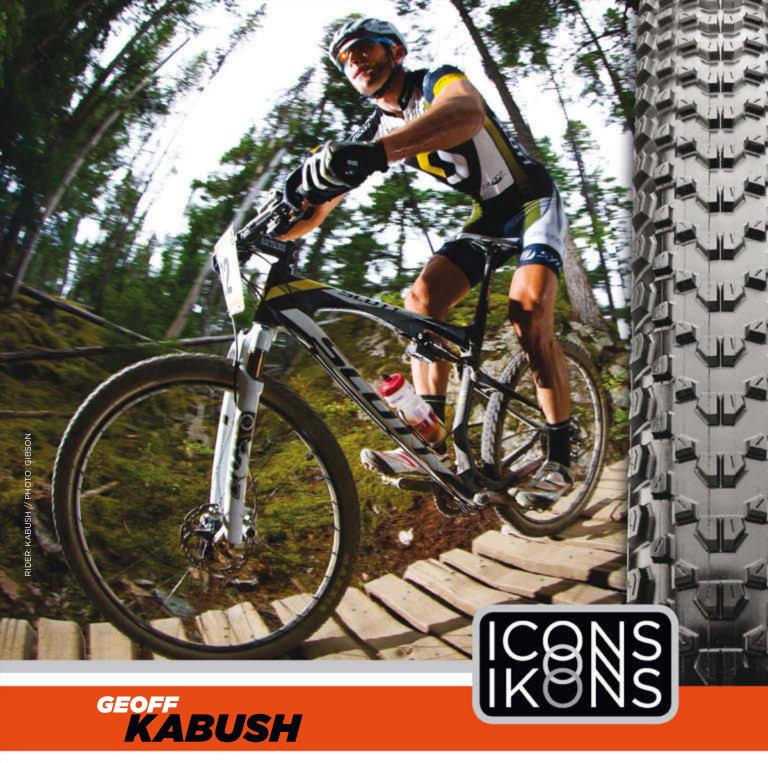
IF I WERE A SUPERHERO, MY SECRET POWER WOULD BE THE ability to screw up gracefully. In my years of mountain biking and ocean kayaking, and in spite of my general klutziness, I've never broken a bone, sprained anything, or had a prognosis that included words like 'ligament' or 'sutures.' I don't have railroad track scars to show when conversation lags at parties, or stories about compound fractures that I laugh about now. I've only received one stitch after having a sewing needle removed from my foot, due to a wild night spent losing needles willy-nilly into shag carpet while stitching pieces of cardboard together. If you're playing the guessing game 'Drunk or Kid,' this falls under the 'Kid' category.

This isn't to say that I'm exceedingly agile—or careful. I'm the person who at least once a week slams her head into the car's roof rack as though the load bars haven't been there for 15 years. The first decade of my riding career gilded me with the title 'Endo Queen,' a difficult achievement in Florida's flatlands. It wasn't until my second son that I learned to correctly size up a doorway before walking through it while holding a kid. At times, my astounding lack of injury and dumb luck create a sense of invincibility that leads to riding bikes while wearing rollerblades ('Drunk' category).

Then I remember the herniated discs in my back–ticking time bombs that can turn me into a groaning 80-year-old with too much pain to be patient and too much life under my belt to settle for boredom. Ironically, I got injured doing nothing–the result of too much time spent in a chair, rattling off code into a computer from the confines of a cubicle. Just like that, the cape of invincibility woven through youth and drunken exploits slips from my shoulders.

At times, these discs have made me limp, turned short sets of stairs into Mount Everest and glued my keister into bed with fears that my last good ride was behind me. Most of the time, the effects are so imperceptible that I have to remind myself how luxurious it is to move without pain. But I don't have to feel the discs to know that they're there, biding time until they decide whether to hobble me tomorrow or never knock on my door again.

The last time I couldn't ignore the power they wield over my life was years ago, when I lived on the road as an itinerant trail builder. The chance to teach volunteers about singletrack brought me to a grassy blank canvas ripe for new trail. With each footfall, the serpentine line of orange-tipped pin flags behind me grew one step closer to fruition. With my bag of rusty pin flags growing light, I slipped and



Geoff Kabush has been with us for a long, long time and has been instrumental in providing feedback during the development of many of our cross country tires. With his trademark sideburns and his "attack mode" riding position, Geoff is an easily recognizable figure in cycling.

Being a tall, powerful rider, Geoff chooses the 29x2.20 Ikon for race day. Up front, he will use the Ikon without EXO Protection for the weight

savings, but out back he wants the added durability that EXO provides. Of course, Geoff always elects to run the 3C Maxx Grip compound for traction in a broad range of conditions.

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# DAILY COMMUTE





## **O74 BUTCHER PAPER**

fell. A mere misstep on a hill still damp with last night's dew. The ground was soft and giving, but its impact echoed down my leg until a crescendo of pain filled a space previously occupied by blissful nothingness. I grimaced through class the next morning, unable to sit or stand. I watched my flags transform into trail through photos while lying in bed. As we drove to the next city, I laid in the back seat watching raindrops race one another down the window—something I hadn't done since my childhood, when long drives turned the back seat of my mom's Chevette into a vinyl-lined fort of boredom. Weeks later, the pain disappeared as quickly as it materialized. Despite my ebullient relief, the fear of my body betraying me again lingered. I was bound to fall again. We all are.

"Hi, my name is Martha. But people usually just call me Jeff." As she spoke, her septuagenarian hands loosely clasped the desk. Though her neat silver hair suggested she'd been out of school for decades, she carried the air of a lifelong student. Her constant desire for knowledge was what brought her to a trailbuilding class she could have very well taught. In a room filled with downhillers and cross-country racers, she exclaimed that she loved building mountain bike trails. 'Jeff,' who gained her nickname from the "Mutt and Jeff" comic strip, was elevated to hero status. How awesome was it that this little old lady helps build trails for her grandkids to enjoy? "And I love riding singletrack! I've helped build 25 miles of trail and finished a switchback last weekend."

If Superman had a grandmother, Jeff could kick both their asses. At the workday, when strong backs were asked to come forward, she grabbed a Pulaski and, there in a steady rain, Jeff swung the blade with a focused persistence normally reserved for military generals and cats stalking a new fish tank. The volunteers stepped up their energy to match hers. Whether it was due to inspiration or fear of being 'chicked' by a grandma, she affected everyone around her. Afterward, we piled into the back of a faded blue pickup truck, rain-soaked and quiet with the proud exhaustion that comes from creating something from nothing. I grabbed the best seat in the house on an over-turned bucket next to Jeff, because it's not often you get to sit next to the person you hope to one day be. Peeling off our work gloves, in that moment our hands were nearly identical. Mine were wrinkled with dampness and calloused from years spent gripping handlebars and trail tools. Jeff's were the tissue-paper hands of my grandmother, wrinkled from a life well lived as much as by age, calloused from working with chainsaws decades before.

There we were, 50 years and 5 inches between us. Jeff's presence helped assuage nagging fears that my life would be defined by that over which I have no control. I saw in Jeff that, no matter what, my life will always be defined by me. Nearly 10 years later, the time bombs in my back remain all but forgotten. And Jeff, well, she's still building trails.

On nights when my mind wades through waves of darkness and decreasing lucidity as consciousness wrestles with sleep, dreamy visions of riding through the woods at the perfect pace of happiness sometimes give way to an unhelpful series of What Ifs. What if my back finally gives out? What if something else happens? What if my bikes become dusty relics of a period only referred to as "back in the day?"

That's when I think about Jeff. Maybe I won't always be able to ride. Maybe I'll be an avid stamp collector half a century from now. Or perhaps I'll be the little old lady making whippersnappers work harder on the trail. For now, I don't need a palm reader to tell me that my lifeline will always be creased with dirt.

And if I do get hurt in the future, it sure as hell won't be from doing nothing.





## less is more

## LIGHTENING THE PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL LOAD

FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, ALMOST EVERY RIDE I HAVE TAKen has been recorded by a small GPS receiver and logged into a program on my laptop. The program is not social, and theoretically the data is only seen by me. That is to say, I don't Strava. Still, I have compulsively recorded almost every mile ridden since some time in 2007. The record has at times been depressing. Whole months every year when not one wheel revolution was recorded, coinciding with work overload induced by springtime releases of new bikes, grinding out copy and photos, when everyone else was frolicking in the hero dirt and green grass. Empty holes devoid of .gpx data coinciding with tradeshow season, getting air conditioned and swaybacked beneath fluorescent lights during the perfect peak of Indian summer. One- and two-week blank spots when periods of injury or sickness wiped away any small fitness gains. Dark patches of no data that spelled out days lost in airports and cramped airline seats.

Last fall, right after testing concluded for *Bike's Bible of Bike Tests*, a sprained ankle took me off the bike for a month. I returned to riding as the weather plunged into the first real rain in years—my ankle swaddled in a bulky brace, stuffed in a plastic bag to keep it dry–pedaling grimly along on wet roads; the trails obliterated by

rain. The GPS unit did not survive. As the rains abated, the dirt turned absolutely incredible. Instead of riding my brains out, I moved house, re-sprained my ankle, limped through the holidays and ushered in the New Year by hacking away at dormant poison oak and chopping the first trails into my new backyard. The first ride back on those trails was one of the best of my life. It was a short, brutal affair that served three purposes: It illuminated how out of shape the time off had rendered me, it validated all the trail work and it rekindled my love for my bicycle. It was a ride when the GPS and smartphone stayed home. There was no track of the ride, no gain/loss statistic and no photos uploaded to Instagram during or after. Just a chunky hour of sublime punishment and rewardexperienced, savored and filed nowhere but in my synapses and protesting muscle fiber. Since it was home turf, the "What if I get lost, what if I get hurt?" rhetoric that mandates carrying GPS units and phones was muted, and the lack of devices felt like liberation.

In the mid-2000s, I had a similar revelation about packing. I had been living in Northern California's Sierra Mountains prior to moving back to Santa Cruz, and was at the tail end of a carefree decade dominated by all-day rides, all the time. This kind of riding



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## 078 GRIMY HANDSHAKE

in alpine terrain dictated wearing a pack filled with rain gear, food, tools and a firstaid kit. Because if things go wrong out in the back of beyond, being prepared is a good way to increase the odds of staying alive. I moved back to Santa Cruz, started working lots of hours, and my rides became less frequent and much shorter. But I still carted around a Deuter Trans Alpine stuffed to the gills. One day, a sore back crowding my thoughts, I dug into my pack to see how I might lighten the load. I found two tubes with holes in them tangled up with two functional tubes, two patch kits with dried glue, a full ball-end hex wrench set and a 10-inch pair of channel-lock pliers alongside three multi-tools, a shock pump missing some parts, a single Avid BB7 brake, a rain shell that smelled like a 40-year-old tent, a space blanket, Clif bars and Gu gels that ranged from a few weeks fresh to almost 5 years old, a can of Tecate and an old railway spike. I decided that riding with water bottles and jersey pockets filled with the bare necessities would be fine for the sub-3-hour coastal shift.

From there, the list shrunk even more. Spare tube, pump, multi-tool, go. Eat before or after, stick the water in bottle cages, ride with awareness of limitations. For the riding I've been doing the past few years, in the part of the world I've mostly been riding, this has worked. I'm not advocating this as a smart way to deal with winter fat biking in Michigan or desert touring in Arizona. However, for my day-to-day, stripping to the minimum and acknowledging that shit can and will happen regardless of preparation has been an eye-opener.

This may be heresy, but I am experiencing a recurring 'less is more' revelation. Think less, pack less, compensate less, analyze less, catalog less. Ride more, experiment more, experience more, learn more, enjoy more. The rides have started getting longer again as the ankle and the fitness have started to come back. and the possibility of getting lost, hurt or breaking down a long way from home is again a reality. But the lightened load has become addictive. Instead of wondering how much I can bring to counter potential eventualities, I counter by assessing the bare minimum I can get away with if I take a few chances.

The ride log is going to have a lot of holes in it this year. And the phone won't be getting answered as much. There are a lot of rides on the calendar, but there won't be much photographic evidence. Perfect.



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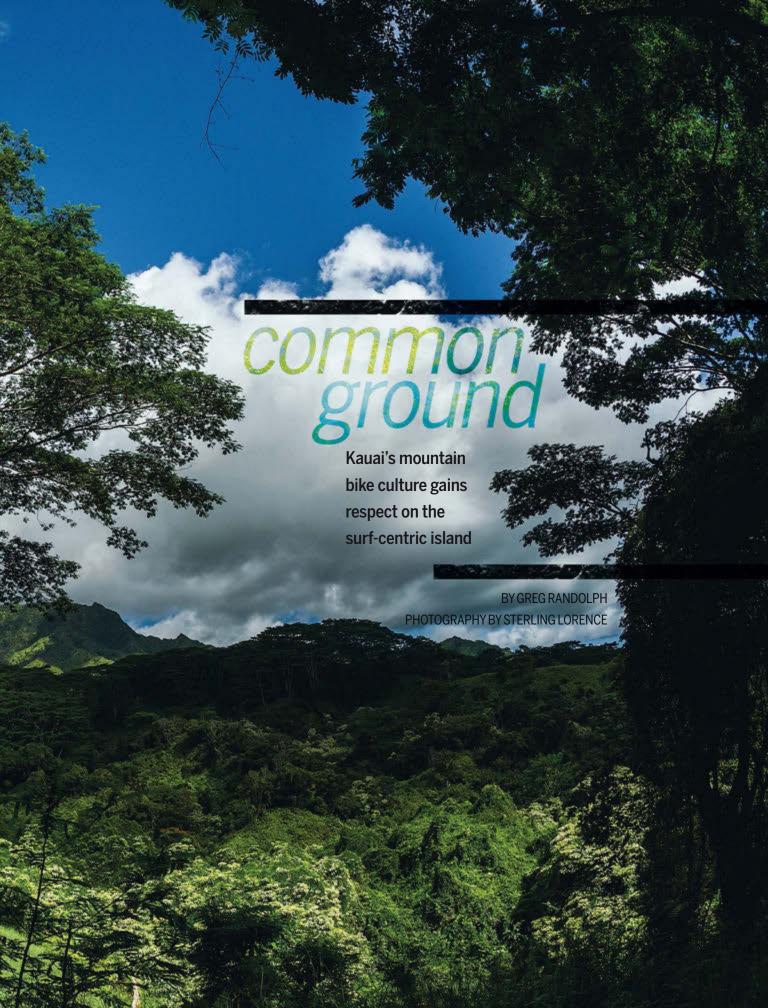


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In September 1992, Hurricane Iniki rocked the north shore of Kauai, Hawaii, disconnecting it from the rest of the island and causing almost \$2 billion in damage. The powerful storm wiped out bridges, sending chickens swirling down the Kuhio Highway and displacing hundreds of residents. During reconstruction, a former laundry building, which had also served as a halfway house for the iconic Kauai chicken population, was moved to its present location next to the Hanalei Dolphin Restaurant.

Johnny Sargent, aka 'Sarge' or 'Johnny Makani,' idled past this single-walled shack, and where others had only seen devastation, to him this was opportunity. The vision of opening and owning a bike shop flashed before his eyes.

Johnny, a native of Southern California and the son of an engineer at the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, had been living on the island since graduating from college in 1979. He was raised on rebuilt motors, supedup cars, motorbikes and the freedom to roam the scrubby hills above the coastline. Johnny graduated from the University of California San Diego with a degree in biology, and before the ink on his diploma had dried, he shipped off to join a buddy who lived on the North Shore of Kauai. Johnny's wife and high school sweetheart, Lynn, joined him shortly after and the couple stayed for good.

When Johnny first arrived on the island, he founded a Zodiac shuttle service running 15 boats of wide-eyed tourists and curious locals up and down the foreboding Na Pali Coastline, a jagged stretch of precipitous cliffs, medieval-fortress rock formations and beach landings that would make even the saltiest of sailors pucker. Locals who initially said he was crazy to navigate such waters eventually forced him out. So he put his mechanical youth to work starting a marine repair business, before ultimately finding his calling in bikes and bike culture.

I first met Johnny, now 58, several years ago on a chairlift in Sun Valley, Idaho, where his winter migration pattern had taken him each year for the better part of three decades. It didn't take much to goad me into reversing Johnny's migratory flight path, and seven years ago I found myself climbing the steps of the makeshift chicken coop that had become a shop called the North Shore Bike Doktor.



## THE 'DOKTOR' IS IN

When I first visited the Doktor, Mudvayne riffs blasted out of the refurbished one-room hut elevated 6 feet above perfectly combed grass. Like Dian Fossey observing gorillas, I peered through the window, witnessing Johnny for the first time in his natural environment.

I entered and we exchanged the requisite Kauaian bro-shake. He greeted me as though we'd just seen each other yesterday. "Yeah man! You've got to come ride with the boys this afternoon! It's gonna be sick!" This is how I would be greeted every morning each time I visited for the next six years. He then departed on an animated soliloguy extolling the musical virtuosity of several of the hardestcore bands on earth (which I had innocently believed was just screaming). I would come to learn that 'Makani' (Hawaiian for wind) has deep knowledge on a variety of subjects, revealing a man passionate and invested in the world around him. Botany, biology, anthropology, geology, Hawaiian history, music, boat repair, bikes, weather, waves, right down to

the family tree of everyone in town-the guy has a steel-trap memory for people, names and language. He earns respect from the 'bro-brahs' outside the massive Middles surf break, and walks with a lightness of step and quickness of mind in his adopted motherland that characterizes a man truly in his element.

It took Johnny several years to get me on a ride. Like most naïve, landlocked aqua-phobics from mountain towns, I came to his island to learn the

ocean. His knowledge of the surf and generosity with that knowledge kept me from killing myself and ultimately I gave in to a ride if only because I owed it to him. Years of visiting had brought me to meet most of Sarge's riding partners, a group of characters I'd begun to collectively call the 'Kauai 5-0', but I'd never thrown a leg over a bike with any of them.

That first ride with the 5-0 was inspiring, a remedial refresher on the unambiguous truth that mountain-bike culture lives everywhere. They were a cast of characters unique in setting, but identical in love of the sport and in their desire to share it with whomever has the desire to show up. It's as opposite to the surfing experience as one can get. This part of the world is highly tactile; you feel the air, the light penetrates your being, your nose blooms with scents and the colors change your sense of perception. Most mornings Johnny starts the day in the water, and when I'm lucky I'll catch the morning session with him. Morning

phone calls to Sarge are met with text messages. "Surfing, meet me at the shop!" which is exactly what photographer Sterling Lorence and I did when we came to document the mountain-bike scene Sarge had helped cultivate on the island.

We'd flown in late the night before, and as we rolled up to the shop, the reasoning behind its name became painfully evident. Everything in Kauai is in a constant state of siege by nature-it may be one of the only places on earth where stainless steel rusts. Looking at the Doktor's day's work on this particular morning revealed a department store bike with stanchion tubes seized by a coat of oxidization that looked like mollusks; a neglected hardtail of early 2000s vintage with a chain that did not crease and V-brake springs that looked like they had come off a shipwreck; and a

decent Marin with permanently frozen hub bearings. The daily operations performed by the Doktor are not simple, 'take two and call me in the morning.' They are a steady stream of, 'Get the defib on this guy, he's dying.'

The hubbub of opening hour at the shop reverberated from across the verdant green below the porch. The kinship that Johnny had formed both with the locals and tourists was on display. His ties to the island are through the bike, boat and surf-



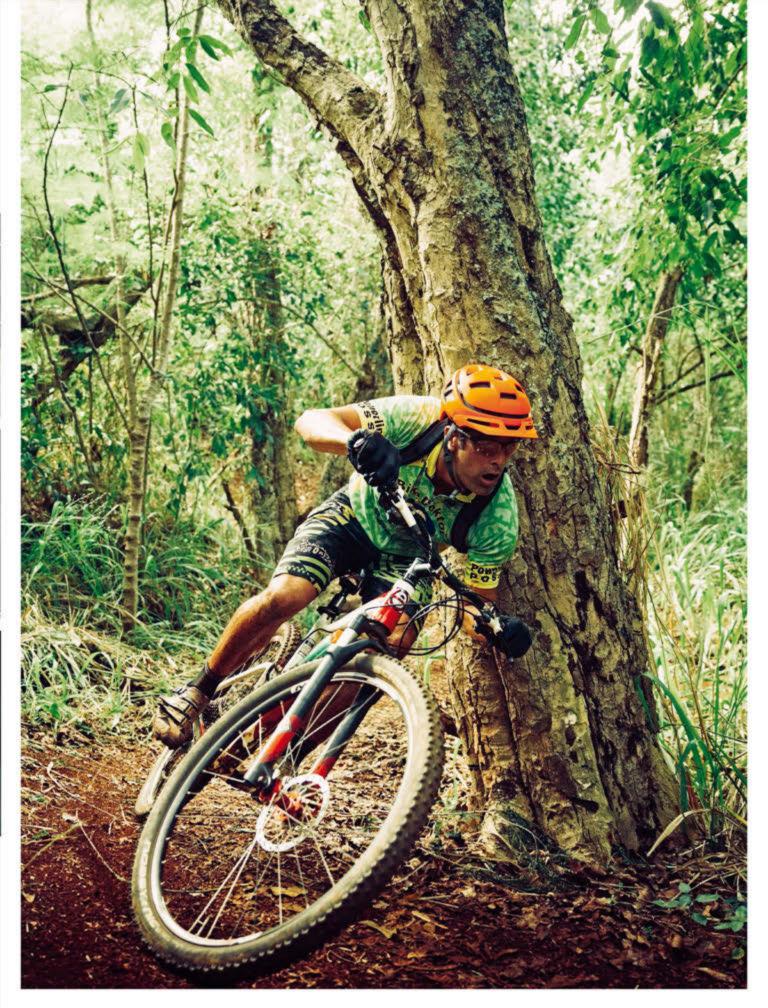
Left to right: Local flair inside of Sarge's Bike Doktor; the daily forecast on the island calls for a SUP session in the morning and trail shredding in the afternoon; Broc Anakalea scouts Da Crack N Back jungle racecourse near the township of Anahola on the east side of the island. Each year the race raises money for the Hokualele Canoe Club, which strives to keep Kauai's youth off drugs and interested in the island's traditional watermen culture; although Kauai's heritage is decidedly based around surfing, mountain bikers are beginning to earn respect among their ocean-minded peers.



Justin and Broc, two of the numerous young men Johnny has

land, exchanged respect with Sarge and proceeded to ask about getting his wife's bike fixed. "Man, she's got to get riding, you know?" mentored over the years, pulled up.

Mintz and Bracher, my buddies from home in Idaho who were on their semi-annual sabbatical, were not far behind. Since Sarge opened the shop in 1993, his task has been to build the riding community one trail, one rider, one race, one group ride at a time. From opening the island's first shop to organizing several of the island's races, he's the big kahuna of Kauai's cycling scene. We made plans for an afternoon ride on a trail network in Anahola, a township on the east side of the island. This was the venue for the event we had scheduled into our trip-Da Crack N Back-a race and fundraiser benefitting the Hokualele Canoe Club on the Anahola Hawaiian Home Lands.



## APPLIANCES AND SHIPWRECKS

Kauai's past tells the same well-worn tale of Caucasian invasion as the continental U.S. Just at the end of the 19th century, in-fighting among the ruling families and influence of white settlers perpetuated a series of events so filled with scandal and intrigue that they would make "Falcon Crest" look like "Sesame Street." Subsequently, the Hawaiian monarchy fell and a few years later, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands was created. Founded in 1921, its purpose was to ensure pure-blood Hawaiians would still have land on which to live, a refreshingly philanthropic, yet still tragic, version of the reservation system in place on the mainland. Choice lands were reserved in a trust, but something was lost, potentially forever.

The story of the Hawaiian is a remarkable one of the waterman, yet the change of life brought about by Westernization of the islands has endangered the native population's connection to Kauaian culture and identity. After Wal-Marts and minimumwage jobs marginalized generations of Hawaiians, the common threats of drugs and alcohol followed. The once-proud way of life of the waterman was frequently forgotten, the passing down of tradition and the skills of the ocean neglected.

The Hokualele Canoe Club was founded as a means to keep the Home Lands' youth tied to the traditional culture of the waterman. It's a direct means of fellowship and an alternative path to the constant specter of crime and drug addiction. The tie between the Canoe Club and Johnny is a labyrinth of mountain bike trails within the Home Lands' boundaries.

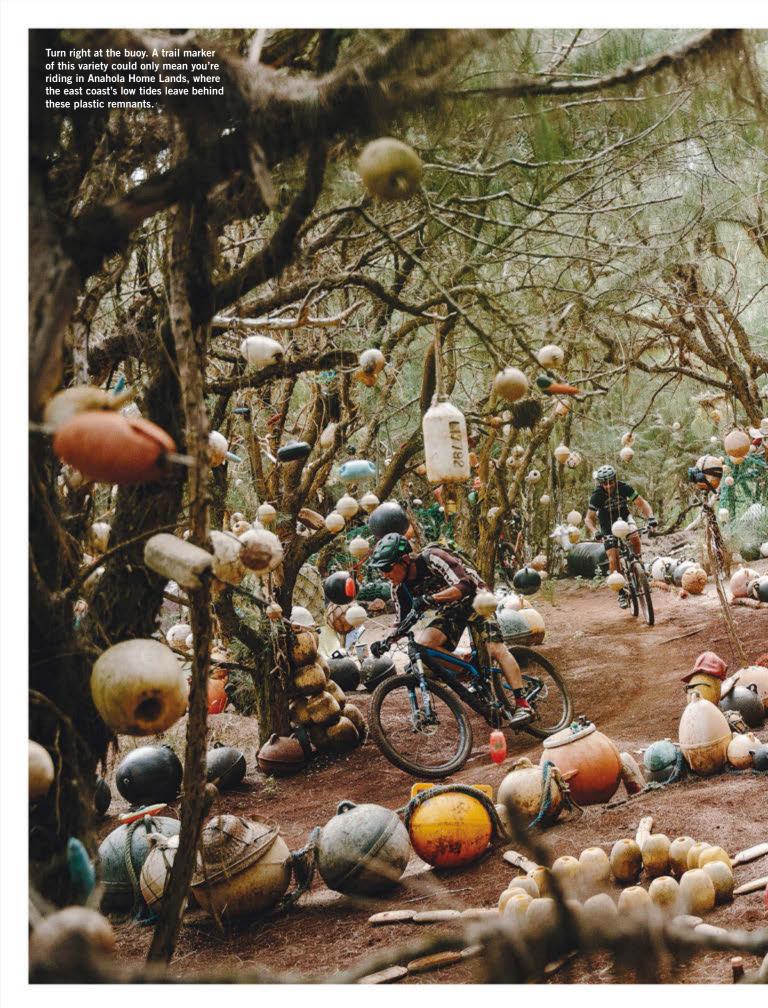
Anahola Home Lands sits on a pristine crescent bay with white sand beaches facing the east Pacific. As we steered our vehicles onto a side street it became obvious we had entered a different realm, one far removed from the high-end real estate, provincial farms and signs of so-called economic progress hugging much of the landscape. We were instead greeted by modest houses, cars on blocks, barking dogs and grinning, shoeless children pedaling bikes down the streets. I wondered how the toothy, shirtless man watering his lawn felt about our passing convoy as he silently traced our path with the arc of his garden hose.

Leggs Yokotake, founder of the Canoe Club and husband of an officer of the Anahola Hawaiian Homes Association, a homestead group for the Anahola Home Lands, greeted us in the lot. It was obvious that mountain bikers don't get a ton of respect in his book, but he respects Johnny and he appreciates the role the race and racers play in his community. The pied piper had summoned his posse and the crew started assembling in the parking lot. Soon the universally familiar scene of the beginnings of a mountain bike ride morphed out of surfboards, boardshorts and flip-flops.

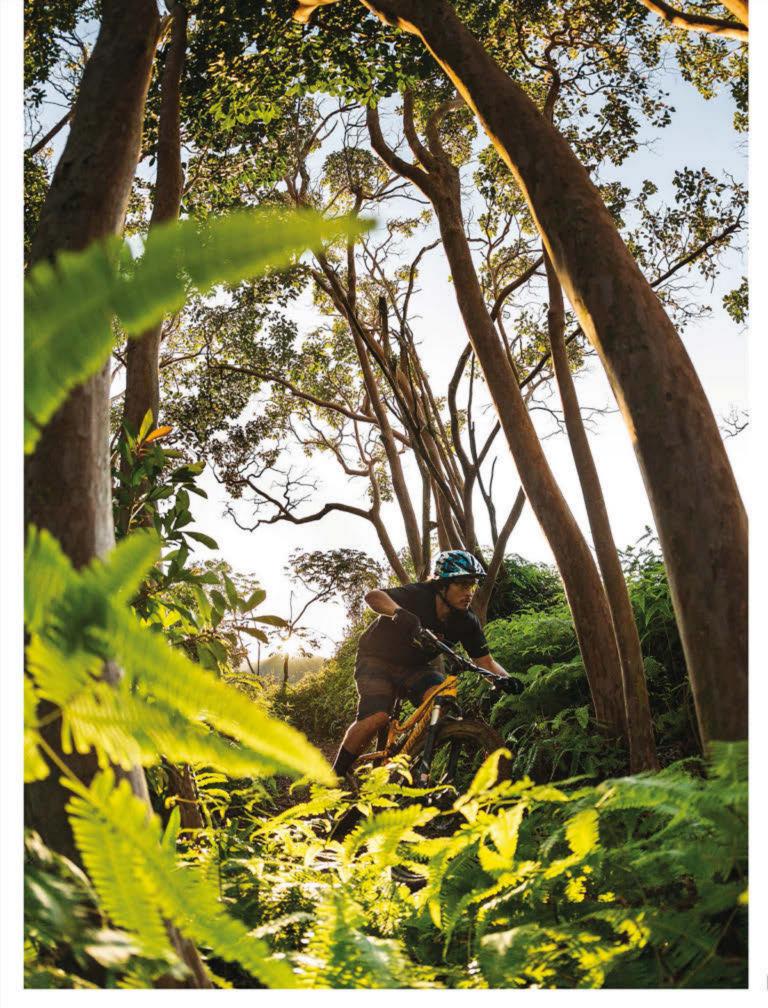
We threw legs over our bikes and headed out











arranged by its resident. Johnny called out, "This guy, he's a bouy-illionaire!"

We pedaled out to 'The Crack,' an ocean feature that is the namesake of the race and the far point of the trail network and the racecourse. Johnny and the boys had alluded to the fact that these trails were a significant redux of what used to exist across the highway. Many historically primo trails had recently been closed, including some that I had hoped to ride in the Waimea Canyon area, and the lament is a familiar one. "Look man, we are losing even to pig hunters (Waimea was closed to riding for fear it was scaring off feral hogs). Nobody in the government gives a shit about mountain biking. It's the way of the islands. But that's okay man, we just keep riding," said Justin.

After a good three hours we were back in the parking lot, clinking delicious beers in cold, sweaty green bottles.

George, one of the characters who

made me want to write about the Kauai 5-0, was telling stories. He moved to Kauai from North Carolina in the late 1960s and has literally crawled, climbed, ridden or hiked every square inch of the island since. A carpenter by trade, organic farmer by necessity and adventurer by nature, he might be the most humble, sincere badass I've ever met. His subdued manner so understates the gnarliness of his exploits it often catches you off guard and you have to ask him to repeat what you can't believe you've just heard. His

tales peak in hilarity and unbelievable outcomes around his self-taught hanggliding career. In particular, an aborted landing on a beach when a dog leapt up and grabbed his leg, hanging on until George shook him off and had to land in the ocean with him still attached. "Oh he was going crazy man. He could barely swim. And he was crawling across my wing, still trying to get me!"

Listening to George talk, I realized that no matter where you go, the mountain bike brings out the best *in* people and the best *of* people. It attracts the free thinker, the tinkerer, the Cub Scout mother and the big guy with a big laugh and zest for life. It's also a place where the nerd and geek are heroes, and whatever barrier that would keep these archetypes from mingling are broken down. On this island, it's no different.

## **ELUSIVE TRAIL**

The weather had been cooperative up to that point, yet rain in the hills kept us from riding Johnny's crown jewel: the Powerline trail.

Built in 1906, Powerline is actually a road connecting the North Shore to the east side, constructed to build the line carrying electricity from the Waineha Hydroelectric Plant to the sugar cane processing plants. It's the site of one of the first races on the island, the eponymous Powerline Race. Founded in 1986 by local legend Scott Ferguson, a Navy Seal and all around hard man, Johnny was entrusted with its future in 1992. The photographs hanging in Johnny's shop tell the story of pre-suspension,

pre-clipless-pedal battles royale on what might be the most technical doubletrack on earth (Johnny and his crew have also been hard at work creating a now-robust singletrack network that crisscrosses the road).

Everyone I met asked if we had ridden Powerline yet, and as the weather failed to cooperate, it was starting to become a gorilla in the mist.

Riding on Kauai is a bit like trying to find good surf: It's fickle, and timing the weather for rideable dirt–especially on the wet side–is like trying to score waves dur-



From far left: Justin Britt practices energy conservation on the Powerline trail in Priceville, Kauai. Powerline is the history-steeped venue of the Powerline Race in the early '90s, one of the first competitive mountain bike events on the island; Sarge, the author and Todd Bracher stand silenced by the views from Powerline; why did the chicken cross the road? Because it could. Kauai's wild chickens are considered sacred, and have few natural predators; longtime local George Knox has story for every square inch of the island, which he's explored by air, sea and land for the past four decades.



ing a big swell at the perfect tide when there is no wind.

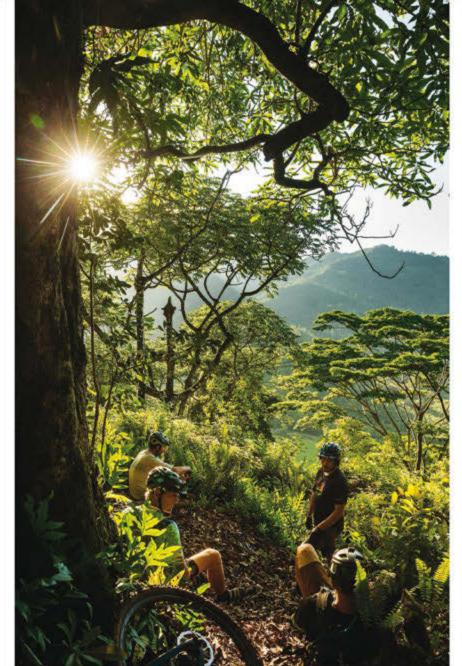
Denied the right conditions for Powerline yet again, we headed up the coast to ride Kalepa Ridge, which promised to be much drier.

Soon we were creeping up an impossibly steep paved road to a water tower. Then we dove into thickly vegetated singletrack, which led to a sweeping panorama of the coast. The red Waimea soil was exposed in a series of hogbacks, and the trail followed the spine of the ridge that divides the island's dry rainy sides.

We plunged into the dark, dank thickness on filling-rattling, rocky singletrack.

Johnny's role as the ringleader of Kauaian mountain biking is as much fixing bikes, organizing rides and putting on races as it is beating back nature. The jungle is constantly reclaiming its turf and a perpetual battle is waged against the flora, which regenerates so fast you can almost watch it grow. Soon we were pushing our bikes, our heads shielded behind the handlebars from razor-sharp grass thickets that Johnny and the boys had hacked through only a month earlier.





10 1 Com





## SUNSET SESSION

Finally blessed with a dry spell a couple of days later, we climbed up the foothills to the now-mythical Powerline trail. The infamous doubletrack bisects the network and we cautiously pedaled up the sandstone road, which felt like ice under our tires. It consisted of the red Waimea clay hardened to rock, but sweating with moisture. It was so greasy that every move felt dicey; even just standing on it was precarious.

The views from here were surreal, and the scale of the mountains above the tiny town of Hanalei came into perspective. Peaks and ridges jut to the sky like jagged shards of glass jammed into the earth. Cloaked in dense vegetation and streaked with several dozen waterfalls running full tilt from one of the rainiest places on earth (Mount Waialeale receives some 38 feet of rain a year), they tower above the bay far be-

low. I froze in my tracks in one of those moments when you are hopeless to do anything other than stand and stare.

We dipped off to the left on the first section of trail and I realized that this was an entirely different type of trail. It was twisty, steep and technical. Narrow hallways of vegetation veered through the understory of dense vivi, guava and ohia groves. We broke into a clearing and rode through Jurassic ulei and Kauai haupu ferns that grew well over 6 feet tall. As usual, Johnny became a Charles Darwin on two wheels, shouting a moving botany lesson as I tried to stay on my bike. But the traction was insane, and every turn reverberated with a "brap!" sound. We stopped and Johnny said, "Oh, how you like that boys? Is that insane or what? You aren't even riding on dirt here, it's all tiny fern roots. That's what makes the traction so bomber."

From left: Johnny and his buddies appreciate the pace of Hawaiian time on the Powerline trail overlooking the Hanalei Valley; Leggs Yokotake blesses the race on the morning of Da Crack N Back; a beautiful backdrop to a unique race.



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094 COMMON GROUND

The sunset faded quickly into darkness, and after a couple of hours sessioning some of the most demanding trails I have ever ridden we were back at the trucks. Cold beers in hand, we recounted yet another day with the boys, and I reflected on how much I was going to miss them.

## GET CRACKIN'

Race day—our last day on the island—broke with a light breeze blowing onshore. Pulling into the parking lot, I was gripped with curiosity as to who would show up for Da Crack N Back. Soon the spectrum of bright colors circled the massive emerald lawn like sharks prepping for a good slaughter.

Johnny's son, Colby, was talking serious smack with the old man, stringing up his soccer cleats, describing the beating he intended to lay down. One of the local hammers whacked open coconuts with a machete on the back of his jeep, then pounded the juice. I marked him as one of the guys who was going to crush me.

We gathered in the middle of the field and Leggs delivered the blessing while racers clutched hands in a large circle. The bond of mountain bikers is strong here. I'm looking at the entire Kauaian mountain bike community, struck again by proof of my thesis: While backdrops vary, the foreground could be anywhere.

Leggs gave the word and we were off. I willed myself to pedal, and we pinned it up into the sugar cane. Rounding a corner where the S.S. Minnow once lay on its side, we encountered a flaming, stinking and toxic pile of molten fiberglass boat. "Hey, Johnny said to get rid of the boat. So the boys, they got rid of the boat," Leggs later explained to me.

Rick Beach, an impossibly lean and mean rider of Tour de France-climbing stature, took the lead and I hung on. My temples pounded with the heat as we exchanged pulls. Agreeably, I took the long, straight stretches, and he took the twisty woodlands, since I kept missing the turns.

He whistled again at my misdirection and patiently waited as I flipped yet another u-ey. The final stretch saw Beach launch a sprint that I couldn't and didn't want to match, and the Kauai road champion and man who had claimed several podiums on Hawaii's hill-climb road races that season added another feather to his cap.

The waning hours of our trip found us pedaling townie bikes toward the end of the road, to the Na Pali Coastline where Johnny got his start. We rode bumpy back roads and trails, passing abandoned *lo'is* (taro ponds) from centuries ago—the last remaining evidence of a civilization uprooted by modernity.

Johnny's grandson, Kana'i, bounced along with us in the child seat over the fender, and I reflected on the history and values of such a special place-values that will be passed on by Johnny to yet another generation.

"Look! Check it out!" Johnny stopped and pointed. "See these *lo'is*? The locals are rebuilding them and working them again. Ah man, these guys, they are figuring it out. They are going to bring back the true Kauaian."





# TRUEBLUE

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE'S CASINO-CLAD EXTERIOR BELIES A TOWN IN THE MIDST OF A MOUNTAIN BIKE RENAISSANCE

## BY NICOLE FORMOSA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN SALM

tar Lake isn't what draws millions of visitors from around the world to this popular corner of Northern California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Most people will never sit on the banks of the tiny turquoise body of water nestled in the Carson Range, some 3,000 vertical feet above the blue behemoth around which life revolves in South Lake Tahoe.

But on a warm day in the middle of June, Star Lake was the center of our small group's universe. We had paused for lunch on the lake's desolate shore, in the middle of a beastly high-alpine ride that wound upward from town through aspen and conifer forests and along the revered Tahoe Rim Trail, before descending through hulking junipers on the freshly dug Monument Pass trail. Despite the mileage and lung-searing high-elevation climbing, it was a day on which to linger. Which is why Scot Nicol, of Ibis Cycles fame, was attempting to master the art of an almond butter and jelly sandwich selfie, and why I was snapping nerdy Instagrams of my bike propped up with the glimmering water and watchful 10,600-foot peaks in the background.

In the middle of our *this is what life is all about* reflections, our host, Ben Fish, pointed out a bald eagle soaring near the mountains towering above the lake.

A bald eagle? Really?

I started to suspect Fish and his coconspirator, local Forest Service engineer Garrett Villanueva, had somehow orchestrated this spectacular day, replete with a cloudless sky, empty trails and the presence of a majestic bird of prey, to show us that South Lake Tahoe once again deserved status on the hallowed mountain-bike destination bucket list.

But by then, I was already convinced on the merit of South Shore's ongoing transformation. The nearly 30-mile grand high-country loop we had embarked on that day didn't exist just days before. Forest Service crews were still etching the 3-mile Monument Pass trail into the dirt and granite slabs by hand, and a previous masterpiece, the 3.4-mile Star Lake Connector, opened in 2011. Those key sections created a manageable loop from town, with 3,800 feet of climbing and multiple route options tying in the Tahoe Rim Trail. Before the connectors, it took a good dose of crazy to knock out the 5,000 or so feet of climbing at elevation required to piece together a 30-mile loop from town, assuming you wanted to bypass multiple miserable, deeply rutted fire roads.

"You'd go up there three or four years ago to Star Lake and you'd be lucky to



With good reason. The city, which was hard hit by the recession and still suffers from above-average unemployment, relies heavily on sales tax and hotel-occupancy tax from tourists, many of whom come to visit the nearby casinos or Heavenly Mountain Ski Re-

outh Lake Tahoe represents the working-class, blue-collar side of Lake Tahoe, where gambling is legal just over the border in Stateline, Nevada, service-sector jobs abound and housing nickname among locals-'Poverty with a View'-could be a bit of an exaggeration, it is less pristine than the quaint towns and fancy vacation homes that characterize the lake's North Shore. But the number of full-time, year-round residents and middle-class families who live there gives







Max Jones, a Tahoe fixture and two-time National Mountain Bike champion, spent an entire summer in the early '80s clearing the overgrown water flume—last used in the late 19th century to transport water to logging operations—and shaping it into a mountain bike trail.

TAMBA was instrumental in negotiating an agreement with Spooner Lake State Park, where the trail begins, and the Forest Service to keep the trail open to mountain bikers. The early incarnation of TAMBA also lobbied for mountain bike access to the Rim Trail, the 165-mile gem that circumnavigates Lake Tahoe, traveling through a combination of Wilderness area, the Pacific Crest Trail and National Forest land.

About half of the Tahoe Rim Trail is now open to mountain bikes, serving as the South Shore trail system's backbone.

"We had to give up a lot of powder days in the winter to fight for those trails," Bell said from his tiny ski and bike shop, located on South Lake's main boulevard.

The Bells ran TAMBA for 13 years, during which time membership peaked at 1,200, but they eventually burned out from the nonstop demands of a volunteer organization. After they stepped aside in 2001, TAMBA's leadership floundered and mountain bikers' relationship with the local Forest Service district office became strained. Bell was disappointed to see hard-won progress stopped cold in its tracks, but the foundation laid by that first group of volunteers ultimately stood firm under the pressure of change.

From left: Todd Woodward knows how to make friends; the serene Star Lake is one of the South Shore's high-country gems.

everal factors coalesced to catalyze South Lake's mountain-bike renaissance in the mid to late 2000s. TAMBA's new, motivated board of directors was a big part of it. So was a willingness from the local Forest Service district office to partner with TAMBA, a federal about-face that still seems surprising to advocates from the 1990s, when battling with the federal government for trail access was inevitable. But, really, most trails lead back to Bill Clinton.

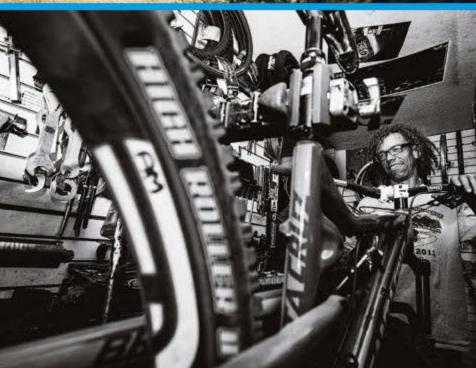
Clinton came to the shores of Lake Tahoe in 1997 to sign an executive order prioritizing the protection of the clarity of the alpine beauty (west coasters, in particular, might remember the 'Keep Tahoe Blue' campaign that spawned a rash of \$1 bumper stickers that you still see plastered to station-wagon bumpers in various states of wear), which kick-started a massive public-private funding effort.

A year later, the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act formed, allowing the Bureau of Land Management to sell certain public lands in Nevada in part to fund Lake Tahoe restoration projects. By 2000, Congress had passed the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, doling out \$30 million per year for 10 years from that fund, of which \$200 million went to the Forest Service to pay for environmental projects like forest thinning to reduce wildfire danger and sediment and erosion control to prevent runoff from muddying the lake. The Forest Service manages about 160,000 acres in the Basin, including 335 miles of trails.

At that point, the Forest Service had access to funding and its own trail







crews, but there was no mountain bike advocacy group to partner with to apply for grants so they could actually win some of those millions. The opportunity would be wasted unless Villanueva could convince someone to re-start TAMBA.

The problem was that nobody trusted the Forest Service, which had been decommissioning some of the most popular (but illegal) rowdy DH trails like Lake Valley and the Chinese Downhill network on Kingsbury Grade northeast of town.

It was indicative of an epidemic of that era, a vicious cycle of tear down, rebuild, tear down, before the Forest Service and locals wised to the notion that working together instead of at odds would be far more productive.

Trying to rally locals for a workday or a meeting to discuss future projects was fruitless. "People aren't going to hang out with the Forest Service, especially when they shut down your trail the year before," Fish said.

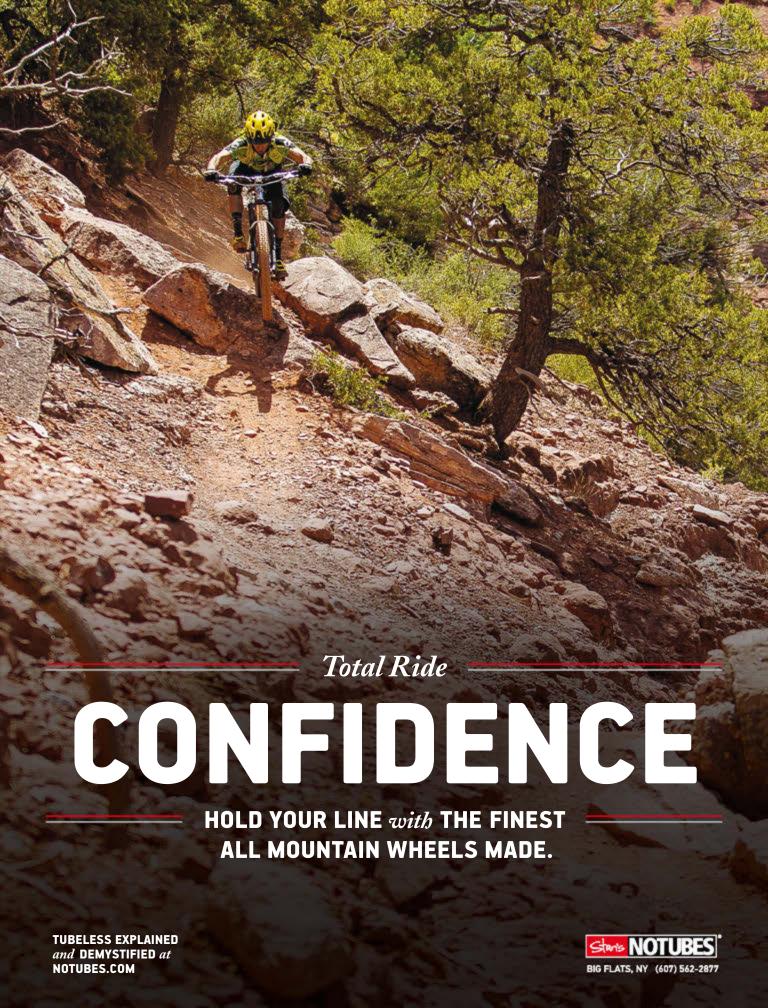
By the late 2000s, that dynamic started to change in Tahoe and all over the West, led by movements in such places as Wyoming's Teton Pass. Mountain bikers like Kevin Joell, currently TAMBA's trails director, and the Fishes understood that joining forces was the only way they could tap into funding to build trails that wouldn't be in danger of disappearing on a ranger's whim.

In 2010, after nearly 10 years of inactivity, TAMBA officially banded back together with a new leader at the helm and a new mission. In a mere five years, the group has made a decade's worth of progress, if not more.

"It's taken years for the Forest Service to come around to build new trails that are fun, all-mountain trails," says Bell. ... "[The Fishes] have lifted TAMBA to heights I never could have imagined."

wo of the biggest undertakings were the Star Lake and Monument Pass connector trails, where Forest Service crews have turned unrideable doubletrack, or nothing at all, into beautifully hand-built singletrack wending from the upper reaches of the high country back to the Cold Creek trail.

From the top: TAMBA president Ben Fish is all smiles at the group's annual Halloween Night Ride on the Corral trail; Jeremy Benson and Casey Coffman ride a prime piece of Rim Trail singletrack near Freel Pass; bike shop owner Gary Bell pioneered South Lake's mountain bike movement in the early '80s.





Cold Creek, a 4-mile descent reworked in 2009 and 2010, is commonly used to link town to high-elevation trails. Its top section gives new meaning to the term 'bouldering problem,' with dishwasher-sized granite rocks and a few turns tight enough to inspire you to hone your trials skills. You can exhale on the bottom half, which flows lazily through an aspen forest alongside the trail's namesake creek.

Another recently built trail, Van Sickle, hovers above Lake Tahoe at Stateline. From its high point of 7,800 feet, where it connects with the Tahoe Rim Trail, Van Sickle descends 1,400 feet to a park near the base of Heavenly Resort on mostly smooth singletrack that passes under chairlifts and over creek crossings, then spits you into an old burn area, where charred tree trunks contrast with green ski slopes and a bright blue sky. Then the trail opens into a sweeping classic South Lake Tahoe view of the lake and the casino skyline. The crux winds around a switchback that descends into a series of 2-foot rock stairsteps that are makeable so long as your eyes don't wander to the stunning mountain-ringed body of water off to your left.

The beauty of Van Sickle-and most of the South Shore trails-is that it can be as long or as short as you want. Squeeze in an out-and-back after work, or link it up to any number of connectors on the Rim Trail for an all-day outing. Van Sickle stands to become even more pivotal to the trail network when Heavenly completes its 9-mile mid-mountain bike park next summer. As part of the plan, Heavenly has agreed to allow an 8-mile public trail called Panorama that will hook into the top of Van Sickle, then cut through the resort and connect back up to the Rim Trail, landing riders near the new Monument Pass trail. From there, you could descend, connect to Cold Creek and Powerline and be lakeside at the pub in time for happy hour (or a yoga stand-up paddleboard class).

"We're a black hole in the middle of connectivity," said Andrew Strain, Heavenly's vice president of planning and government affairs. "Our proposal will

Forest Service employees in the Tahoe Basin often work in the dirt alongside volunteers. Here, crews maintain a trail on Tahoe Mountain, on the town's west side.

fill that and make the South Shore even more connected than it is today."

All that aside, the landmark collaboration thus far between TAMBA and the Forest Service is the Lower Corral trail, the first jump trail in the Tahoe Basin-if not the country-that the Forest Service not only approved and helped pay for, but also spearheaded design and construction. The government chipped in \$25,000 to design the 3-mile benchcut moto and mountain bike trail with features like tabletops, elbow-dragging berms and jumps in an effort to curb illegal trailbuilding in the National Forest. TAMBA raised another \$25,000 to pay for the actual construction, which was headed by the Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship, the successful nonprofit behind the Downieville Classic event in nearby Sierra County. TAMBA is currently fundraising to build a third and final leg of Corral that would drop riders onto Power-









line for an easy cruise back to town.

Corral provides yet another important connector from the high country to town. From the Rim Trail, you can rack up almost 4,000 feet of descending by dropping in at Freel Pass 9,800 feet above sea level-the highest point of any trail in Tahoe-for an 11-mile singletrack session through the vast fir-tree forest of the Armstrong Pass trail and onto Corral. Armstrong is not overly technical, but riders with an imagination will see plenty of opportunities to boost trailside rocks or log-ride fallen trees. Finishing with a rip through the rock gardens, high-wall berms and tabletops on Corral affords the kind of pure gravity-fueled joy that gets mountain bikers out of bed in the morning.

And soon, the good times won't end there. TAMBA is building a bike park on an empty 4-acre lot in the heart of town that will house a BMX track, pumptrack, slopestyle course and skills park. The city council already earmarked \$100,000 for the project—nearly mind-boggling in a town that is just coming around to accepting mountain bikers—and TAMBA has set aside another \$8,000. Builders will break ground this summer.

Of course, not every move the Forest Service has made has been popular. Some of the old-school contingent still cringes about the Kingsbury Grade area off the Rim Trail on the Nevada side of South Lake, where illegal DH trails named after Kung Fu stars Jackie Chan and Jet Li sprouted up repeatedly, each time sketchier and less sustainable than the time before. The Forest Service and TAMBA are working to fund and build legal gravity trails to end the decade-long dirt wars. A proposed reroute of the Chinese Downhill, or Kingsbury Stinger, will add 2 miles in length-from 2.6 miles to 4.5 miles—and multiple technical rock features. In total, 8 new miles of trails are planned at Kingsbury Grade. The Forest Service has secured \$150,000 in grants for the project, which TAMBA volunteers and Forest Service crews will build starting this year.

"We're trying to be nonreactive," Forest engineer Villanueva says. "We're trying to be proactive in opportunities and how we're managing the forest. We're making conscious choices on how to manage the forest instead of just letting it happen."

From top: Wonder Woman and Gargantua reunite at the Corral Night Ride; casinos in Stateline, Nevada, dot the South Shore; Forest Service engineer Garrett Villanueva; TAMBA's Amy Fish and Nils Miller plot their next project over a backyard beer and fire pit.



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LIDE PLOGLESSIVE



The Tahoe Rim Trail traverses the Carson Range above the South Shore and serves as the backbone of the local trail network. Benson and Coffman discover why the section between Freel Pass and Armstrong Pass is so popular.

Despite the progress, some concern exists that development won't continue at the same pace in the future. With the expiration of the funding from the Tahoe Restoration Act, the future of the federal dollars that have been up for grabs is uncertain.

But TAMBA now has a solid foothold with several grants under its belt and a core group of volunteers dedicated to keeping the momentum going regardless of what happens at a federal level. A community centered on mountain biking finally exists again—trail days teem with eager volunteers (last year TAMBA logged more than 3,900 volunteer hours) and marquee events like the Corral Trail Halloween Night Ride (costumes *not* optional) the Rose to Toads mega 62-mile sufferfest and the Meyers Mountain Bike Festival fill the calendar.

And now that they have built it, people are coming. "There are so many trails that didn't even exist five years ago or they were in such crappy shape

that people wouldn't come back after a 3-hour drive from the Bay Area," Fish says. "Now there's so much going on. There's a lot more buzz, and people traveling to ride Tahoe as well."

Troy Rarick, owner of Over The Edge bike shops, has a knack for scouting the next big place. He opened a shop in Fruita, Colorado, before it was pilgrimage-worthy for the world's mountain-bike faithful and followed suit in Hurricane, Utah, Melrose, Australia, and Sedona, Arizona. Next he'll franchise the name and successful business formula to Sam and Brie Hyslop, a North Shore couple who plans to open Over the Edge this fall in South Lake Tahoe. Their goal is the same as the other OTE shops: Be the go-to resource for core mountain bikers.

Rarick, who lived in South Lake Tahoe in the early '90s when he led rehabbing gang members on rock climbing trips, wants to be part of the mountain bike revolution in his former hometown.

"I think there's a glaring opportunity," Rarick said. "There's so much infrastructure there based on tourism and the ski industry. The fact that there are miles and miles of awesome singletrack

in an amazing setting, it's a kind of undiscovered paradise."

Lake, Scot Nicol, a Bay Area local who hadn't been to the South Shore in years, was falling hard for a side of Tahoe he had all but written off. After five days sampling the best of the South Shore trails, grinning like a 12-year-old the whole time, Nicol returned home in June. He came back three more times that summer and fall.

"I was kind of smitten with the place. I think that when you're a NorCal person you kind of tend to go to Truckee and the North Shore and Incline and the Flume—all those kind of places. South Shore's a little seedy, it's got all the casinos, it's kind of the sibling you don't want to talk about. There's definitely that seedy aspect to it, but it's amazing what you can do with a few dedicated people, like TAMBA and the Forest Service. Now, the (Sierra) Buttes (Trail Stewardship) are taking an interest in it, working with TAMBA. And it's so beautiful up there. It's just a really pleasant surprise."



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A full featured summer weight trail jersey with a little extra sleeve length for added on-bike protection. A full mesh back and wicking Transfer fabric keep you cool and dry on hot days, while a built-in sunglasses wipe keeps your vision clear.

#### WOMEN'S ELEVATE SHORT

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These high-performance all-mountain shorts are constructed from durable four-way stretch fabric that will stand up to the rigors of aggressive all mountain riding. Designed to be worn over top of your favorite liner, the cut is relaxed enough for unrestricted pedaling, and there's plenty of room for kneepads underneath.

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- 8 intake passages/8 rear vacuum vortex outlets
- Multi purpose cam lock adjustable rear stabilizer with +/- 20 mm movement
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#### TRAVIS ENGEL | TEST LOCATION: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

THERE'S A PARALLEL UNIVERSE OVER IN EUROPE FULL OF strange bike brands and odd component trends. We catch glimpses of it through weird ads in foreign magazines and unfamiliar sponsors atop Olympic podiums. Only a few names like BMC and Lapierre have crossed the pond in recent years, and they rarely grab much of a foothold here. But 22-year-old German brand, Ghost, is getting a bit of a leg up from REI. If you want to check out the Ghost lineup in the States, the only place to find one will be at one of the outdoor co-op's 135 stores.

Independent bike dealers get a bit nervous when brands partner with the mass market. Although Ghost's prices are on par with comparable domestic bikes, REI's member dividends give these a 10-percent edge. Not to mention you get to go bike shopping in the middle of an apocalypse survival toy store. But Ghost isn't planning

to rely on its unique marketing to stand out. Like most German imports, it's built on good ole' fashioned nuts-and-bolts innovation.

And the Riot has some pretty innovative nuts and bolts. The derailleur and brake hardware anchor directly to the rear axle, though one tends to shift out of alignment while installing the rear wheel. The rocker plates attach to the seatstays via precision Heim joints that account for lateral flex. And you have to look really closely if you want to scrutinize the linkage design, but it's more fun to just go ride it.

The mean-looking, full-carbon, 130-millimeter Riot didn't descend like the tattooed thug I expected, especially given its unruly name. The 68-degree headtube angle, 32-millimeter Fox Float fork, and the frame's overall light build made it spry and responsive but it wasn't particularly bloodthirsty. The Riot had ample appetite for pedaling, though. The Horst-style rear end and long

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cockpit felt efficient and comfortable on the climbs. It might have been easy to lump this bike together with any other endurance-oriented trail bike, but the frame's titular Riot Link turned it into something more. Early in the stroke, it's subtly more small-bump sensitive and gets drastically more progressive just before bottomout. Granted, there are highly tunable shocks already on the market that allow anyone who can read a manual to dial in these same dynamics. But the Riot offers a more elegant solution. When the linkage does the work on its own, the setup is much simpler and the effects are more dramatic and predictable.

The steep ramp-up at the very end of the travel provides more than just bottom-out resistance. I found myself relying on the firm platform at critical moments, like pumping through a turn or preloading for a jump. And thanks to that little extra early-stroke small-bump compliance, there was never a need to take the rear shock out of Trail mode. The small, but stout, links that achieve this are perched low and in front of the bottom bracket, leaving decent tire clearance between its barely 17-inch chainstays.

So this thing is light, it's nimble, and will still be your best friend after hours in the saddle. But so will any decent trail bike. The Riot Link offers high-tech refinement in a simple package even if you don't read the manual.

#### RYAN PALMER | TEST LOCATION: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

THE RIOT'S CLEAN, UNCLUTTERED LOOK IMMEDIATELY DREW me in while I was perusing the giant halls of the Eurobike tradeshow, held each August in Friedrichshafen, Germany. I knew of Ghost's svelte hardtails from its factory World Cup team, but since the bikes weren't available in the United States, Ghost remained mostly a mystery. This was my first glimpse at a Ghost I might actually want to ride. When I caught wind that the brand was hopping the pond, I jumped on the opportunity to test one.

The Riot's full-carbon frame looks minimalistic, but there's more to the Riot than meets the eye. A lower link, cleanly tucked in front of the bottom bracket enables the bike to provide phenomenal bump sensitivity for most of the stroke, but with a significant ramp-up near the end of the travel to resist bottoming. But, I found that the window of sag to get the bike to behave how I wanted was quite narrow.

At 27-percent sag, the bike wallowed in its travel and had lousy pedaling support. Overcompensating, I tried 20 percent, resulting in great pedaling but bad bump control. The sweet spot was right at 25 percent, balancing pedaling performance and bump sensitivity perfectly. Just a 2 percent change from my starting point transformed the bike from simply okay to an absolute, well, riot.

It's fast, in almost an XC way, but with much more capability than a pure race rig. A fitting description is 'long-travel cross country.' The 130-millimeter Fox Float 32 fork matches the rearwheel travel and helps create a very balanced bike. Handling is quick and nimble, and acceleration is hard to beat. The Riot doesn't really favor uphill or downhill, instead it's more of a jackof-all-trades. The 68-degree headtube angle gives the Riot a good stance for attacking climbs and managing tight terrain, and the 17inch chainstays tuck the wheel in close enough to charge corners with reckless abandon. Once I found the shock's happy place, the rear wheel gave me gobs of traction, sticking to each contour and tracking smoothly through stutter-laden corners. One can't argue much with the full Shimano XTR spec and Easton Haven wheels. I did opt to swap the Ritchey bar in favor of a bit more width, but for a bike spec'd more on the lightweight end of the spectrum the 710-millimeter-wide carbon bar is perfectly fitting.

Though the Float 32 is a good fork, bigger or more aggressive riders will easily overcome its spindly stanchions. For this group, Ghost offers the Riot LT, which sports a stouter 150-mil fork that slackens the headtube by 1 degree. Since I tend to prefer the gravity end of the ride, I decided to slap on a Fox 36 RC2 lowered to 140 millimeters, placing it between the stock Riot and Riot LT. This only added 158 grams to the bike and changed the headtube by a half-degree, but added worlds more confidence and control when things started pointing down. It kept its cross-country feeling, but damping control and tracking vastly improved. While it may seem unnecessary to put such a beefy fork on a bike designed to be more all-rounder than all-mountain, I'd argue that it makes perfect sense. The 36 RC2 is the same weight as the Fox Float 34, but offers infinitely better damping.

Overall, I was impressed with the Riot. The quality German engineering and autobahn speed kept me smiling the whole time aboard this carbon beauty.

GHOST'S TWO CENTS | For the Riot, we calculated and verified the optimal sag position at 30 percent in order to achieve maximum traction. This amount of negative travel provides more confidence while pumping through corners and preloading for jumps, and then returns the bike to a stable position as fast as possible. The unique high-end progression of the Riot Link enables this greater sag. We of course listen carefully to our test riders and customers and value their input. The most common feedback we've received since introducing the Riot is that the fork is unable to keep up with the highly capable rear suspension. In response, we will look at spec'ing a more robust fork with thicker stanchions in the future, along with improved settings on the rear suspension and addressing details like wider bars. We are always happy to engage our audience in the constant pursuit of perfection. Riot started out small but is growing unstoppable.

-Volker Ackermann, Ghost, Head of R&D



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**Includes Composite Matrix frame pump mount** 











juliana bicycles

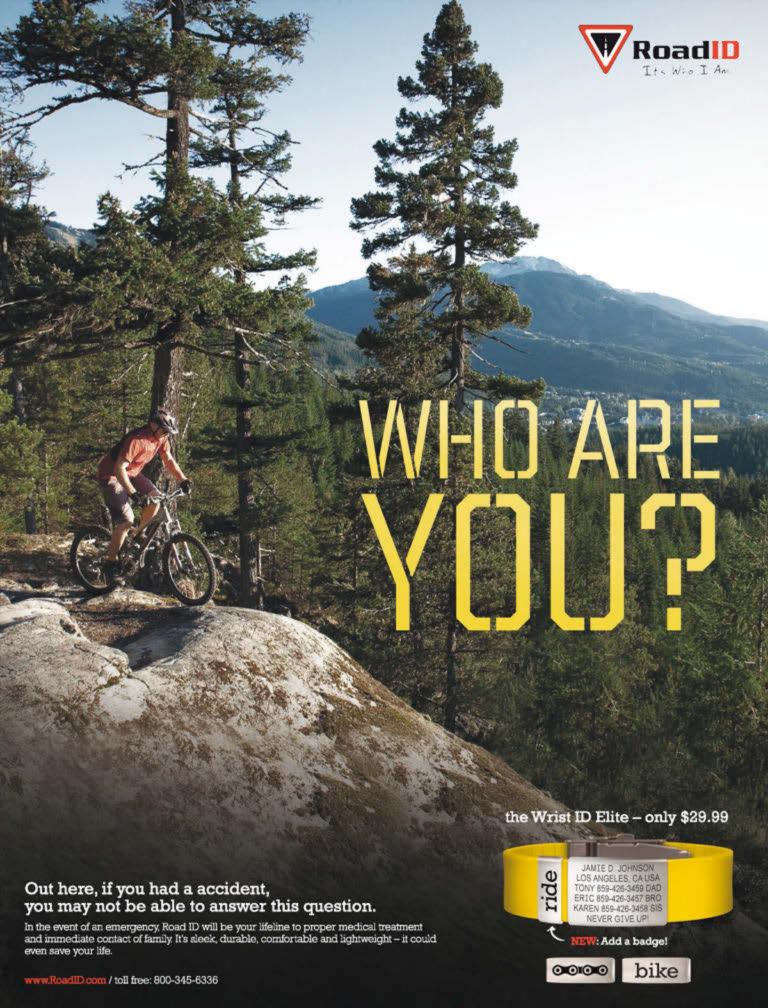
JUNO R | \$2,800

WITH ALL THE FANFARE SHOWERED ON MARQUEE BIKES from Juliana Bicycles in recent years, it can be easy to overlook the rest of the line. I'm as guilty as the next blinded-by-bling rider of getting swept up by the headliners and missing out on the opening band. I chose the Juliana Furtado as my dream bike in 2013 and raved about the Roubion in this year's Bible of Bike Tests, but until now I glossed right over the Juno. The practical, 5-inch-travel trail bike is as capable and fun as its flashier counterparts, and it knocks \$800 to \$1,000 off the 'R' Furtado build.

The Juno's geometry is nearly identical to that of the Furtado with its playful combination of a 68-degree headtube angle, 27.5-inch wheels and 17.1-inch chainstays, but it incorporates a simpler, singlepivot suspension instead of Santa Cruz's VPP. Also, the two complete Juno builds only come in an aluminum frame with a 2x10 drivetrain.

At face value, I assumed the bike would feel clunky on climbs and overwhelmed on descents, but on each ride I grew impressed with its abilities, particularly when it came to suspension and traction. The 130-mil RockShox Sektor fork felt confident on fast, rock-garden descents and the Fox Float Evolution CTD followed suit-the trail seemed to get smoother the more speed I gained. Smaller, low-speed bumps, proved to be a slightly rougher ride. The Maxxis High Roller 2.3-inch front tire and Ardent rear tire mated to WTB Frequency i19 tubeless rims never slipped a single time on a relentless singletrack climb with god-awful-steep 25-percent pitches. The tires also stayed dutifully gripped to the ground on uphill rock ledges and boulders that required hard, out of the saddle efforts to clean.

But, there is a price to pay for affordability and Juliana skimped in a few noticeable places. The lack of a dropper post stands out and will be an upgrade-must for most. Also, some people might miss a second bottle-cage mount. Thankfully, the Juno comes with parts that matter more like a 720-mil handlebar, 142x12 rear axle hub and a 15-millimeter front through-axle. And it could easily be upgraded over time with fancier bits. Or buy the frame and fork for \$1,300 and start from scratch. Either way, Juno has potential to be the star of the show. -Nicole Formosa





orbea RALLON X-TEAM | \$6299

AT FIRST GLANCE IT'S CLEAR THAT ORBEA'S NEW RALLON X-Team is built for speed. With its beefy rear linkage, aggressive stance, and top flight BOS suspension, the bike looks like it's begging to be ridden downhill.

For all of its descending innuendos, when I actually got the Rallon on the trail it was a surprisingly capable climber. With the anti squat characteristics of the rear linkage, power to the pedals delivered a responsive snappy feel. The BOS Kirk rear shock's piggyback reservoir plus high-and low-speed compression knobs indicate a downhill bias, but it has provisions for climbing as well. The lockout lever and tuning designed to balance pedaling support and bump sensitivity allowed the Rallon to maintain traction while powering up some of the most technical climbs on my local trails.

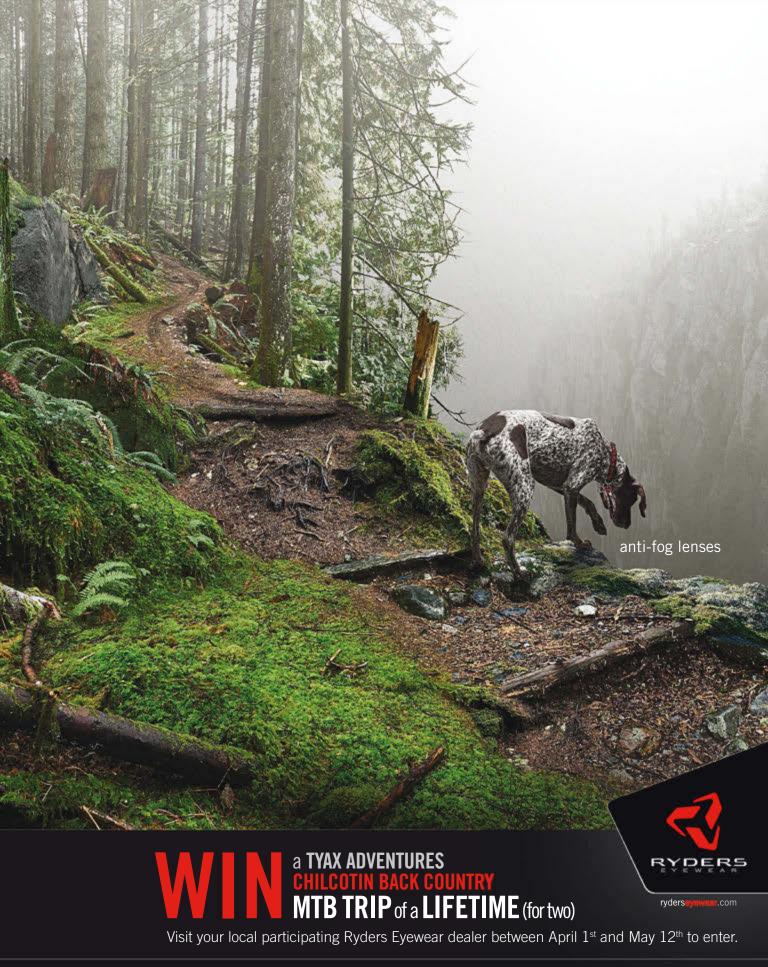
As predicted the descending prowess of the bike was its defining feature. With adjustable geometry via a 2-position forward shock mount, the bottom bracket can sit as low as 13.3 inches with a 66 degree head angle. This, with the short 16.5-inch chainstays, and the Rallon exhibited some really playful, and capable ride characteristics.

Our size large test bike had a roomy 25-inch toptube, giving it a

stable wheelbase despite the short rear end. It really excelled at high speed, and gave me the confidence to push hard through chunky technical sections. Adding to my confidence was the BOS Deville 160 fork. It offered great mid stroke and big hit support without making any concessions on small bump compliance, as well as plenty of adjustment range with independent high- and low-speed compression.

A hydroformed aluminum frame may not have the flash appeal that some of its carbon competitors do, but does offer some key features that any seasoned rider can appreciate. I prefer the smart external routing on the Rallon to increasingly popular internal affairs. Only what's necessary, the Rock Shox Reverb Stealth, is internal. It's also a rare treat to see a threaded bottom bracket, rather than a temperamental press fit. I also loved the integrated downtube and chainstay protection, that round out a clean, easy to work on package.

The Rallon is a strong climber and even better descender. With three models to choose from our top shelf X-Team model offers a smart component spec that complement the bike's burly characteristics. No matter where I was on the trail, the Rallon was up for the challenge. —Anthony Smith





lapierre spicy 527 | \$5,000

ENDURO COURSES IN EUROPE, THE LAND WHERE THIS BIKE calls home, make most U.S. courses seem smooth. So the Spicy 527's 6-inch-travel aluminum frame is beefy as hell, along with its component spec, including the 160-millimeter RockShox Pike and Michelin's Advanced Reinforced Gum-X and Magi-X rubber—some of the burliest tires on the market. Make no mistake; the Spicy came to shred. Scanning the geometry chart will reaffirm this notion, but one steep descent will solidify it. There's a sense of fearlessness and indestructibility that come with the Spicy. But those things apparently aren't very light. At 34.5 pounds with pedals, you'll need some strong stems to get up the climbs. To help you with this is Lapierre's E:I automatic shock system, which uses sensors on the bike to read the trail and rider and automatically switch the shock between modes.

The second-generation E:I system has been pared down to the bare necessities—3 sensors, a battery and a processor cleverly tucked next to the stem. There's just one button and an L.E.D. Riders can cycle between open, medium and locked, or stick it in auto mode and forget about it—which is what this thing is all about.

It's pretty cool: Accelerometers on the fork and stem, and the

internal cadence sensor on the bottom bracket constantly tell the shock whether to be open, medium or locked. When coasting it'll stay open even if the trail is smooth. It figures, if you aren't pedaling you don't need platform. But once you start pedaling, it'll automatically close the shock until the accelerometers feel an impact. It's pretty fast, but not quite fast enough to call the transitions seamless.

It takes a couple pedal strokes for the cadence sensor to realize that the crank is turning. The system can get confused on undulating terrain, constantly going from open to closed instead of putting itself in the medium setting. Also, there's a bit of lag in at the RockShox Monarch shock's switch. All these things will improve as technology advances.

Once I stopped looking down at the constantly changing L.E.D. and realized that the servo wasn't a robot chasing me down the trail, I found that the system allowed me to focus on the trail instead of flipping switches, which is really the whole point. There's no question that Lapierre's system works. Perhaps this is the future of suspension technology. But is it better than mechanical systems that are stiffer when pedaling, softer when shredding already? —Ryan Palmer



# tainted love SIX SADDLES THAT WON'T LEAVE YOU BROKENHEARTED photos: anthony smith

#### WTB VOLT TEAM \$130 | WTB.COM

Since saddle comfort is mostly about fit, it's tough to review them. What I find comfortable might feel horrible to you, so we must stress that finding the right saddle usually requires trying a few out. The Volt is now offered in three widths to increase the odds of a good fit (I liked the 135 millimeter). The rails, however, are short-if you need a lot of fore-aft adjustment, you may need to shop elsewhere. Most saddles these days have a pressure-relief area in the center, and the Volt is no exception. The back flairs up a bit to keep the rider in position, and the nose slopes in the front with a gentle downward curve, so steep climbs don't feel like you just dropped the soap. Out of all the seats in the test, the Volt has the cushiest foam, but not so cushy that you sink into it. The Team version has titanium rails, but it's also available with carbon, cromoly and steel. -Ryan Palmer

#### **FIZIK THAR** \$150 | FIZIK.IT

I don't know how it's possible to make a 29er-specific seat, but that's apparently what the Thar is. Really though, it just has super-long rails that allow for a ton of foreaft adjustment. The flat section of the rails measure 95 millimeters-at least 15 millimeters longer than any of the other seats tested. Depending on how long your seatpost clamps are, you can expect 40 or more millimeters of adjustment. I'd say that's pretty sweet, no matter what wheel size you're running. The Thar is the only saddle we tested that doesn't have a pressure-relief recess, but that might not be an issue if the fit is right. Measuring 125 millimeters at the widest point, it's on the narrower end, but I found that my sit bones (which measure 110 millimeters) fit nicely on the flat-shaped seat. I loved the wide, stubby nose, which made this saddle one of the most comfortable ones for steep climbs. -RP

#### **PRO VULTURE**

#### \$120 | PRO-BIKEGEAR.COM

The Vulture is short, flat and has a wide nose for climbing comfort-the nose on this saddle is a good 5 millimeters wider than the Thar's. This made it easily the most comfy seat for me to climb with. Even though it's only a few millimeters shorter than some of the other saddles tested. Lalmost felt like L was riding a size smaller bike with all the extra hovering clearance it provided. These things, combined with the saddle's 132-millimeter width, made it a top contender for me. I used to avoid V-shaped backs like the plague because they'd cause baggies to snag, but dropper posts mostly alleviate this problem. The two points do give the Vulture some serious talons, though, which managed to inflict a few bruises in key areas. Everything else about this saddle is perfect for me, but the back is fairly sharp for being so close to sensitive areas, which could be a deal-breaker for some. -RP



#### Spyder Outland is Plushness You Can Feel

Float over rough terrains seated on a flexile web cover that continually absorbs shock, keeping you suspended. An ingenious silicone anti-slip pad system (removable) adds extra cushion while keeping you seated on the saddle's sweet spots. The extraordinary Spyder Outland is performance and comfort in 180g

DualTech Carbonite/Removable Silicone Anti-Slip Pads/Chromoly Rails







#### SPECIALIZED WOMEN'S MYTH COMP \$100 | SPECIALIZED.COM

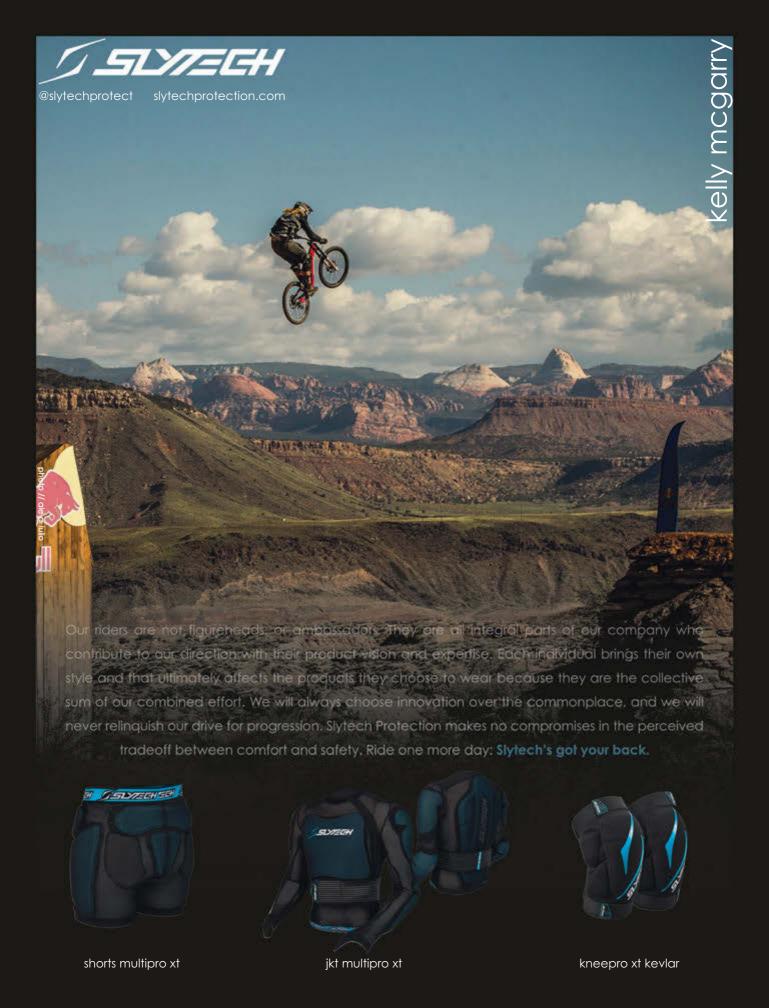
The Myth is the only female-specific mountain-bike saddle Specialized sells. While some brands might commit more to the category, the mid-range Comp offers quality at a reasonable price. I rode both the 143-millimeter and 155-millimeter widths, and found the 143 to be better suited to my body (my sit bones measure about 120 millimeters). Specialized also offers a 168-millimeter to fit the wider sit bones characteristic of many females. The saddle's contour is designed around the women's Body Geometry fit system and incorporates a deep V-groove channel to reduce soft-tissue pressure. That, combined with the highest density of foam padding Specialized makes, means multiple hours aboard the Myth don't feel akin to sitting on a cement block. One thing I noticed right away was the ease of transferring my position out of the saddle on climbs, which is likely due to low-friction padding on the front and rear panels. Those looking for a lighter saddle will need to go elsewhere for a carbon-fiber shell or carbon rails, but at 289 grams for the 155-millimeter, the Myth's weight is respectable. -Nicole Formosa

#### \$QLAB 611 ACTIVE MTB TITUBE \$189 | SQLAB.COM

By far the longest in the test, the Active MTB allows plenty of real estate to move around on-something that might come in handy for some riders on longer slogs. The Active MTB also incorporates a very aggressive down step from back to front, which is meant to relieve pressure as well as provide a sort of buttress to push against on steep climbs. At first, I found the step-down awkward and had a difficult time settling into a comfortable spot, but after some time I grew to really like the feel and added pressure relief the step-down provided. In addition to the step-down, the tail sways side to side a bit in order to follow the rocking of the hips while pedaling. I'm not sure how much this added to the overall comfort, but it was detectable. Most importantly, this flex didn't make any noise. Its long length can make it tough to maneuver the bike around underneath vou, so I'd recommend this saddle for riders who would rather go out on all-day epics than launch their nearest road gap. The Active MTB is available in 130-, 140and 150-millimeter widths. -RP

#### **TIOGA SPYDER OUTLAND** \$140 | TIOGAUSA.COM

Definitely one of the most curious-looking seats on the market, the Outland would definitely be Spiderman's top choice if he rode mountain bikes. Rather than using foam to provide comfort, Tioga went a completely different route. Their Spyder saddles start with a composite material they call "Carbonite" for the frame, which is covered with a flexible plastic-like web. The result is a saddle that has a good suspension feel without all the weight of foam. I found it soft enough to be comfortable without it feeling like I was sinking into the saddle. Removable silicone pads on the rear portion of the Outland provide much-needed traction. When not installed. I found the surface very slippery. It would be nice to see a permanently affixed silicone topcoat for the whole saddle because I found the nose too slippery to remain planted on during steep climbs. A more traditional, rounded shape and 125-millimeter width make it more likely to suit riders with narrower sit bones. -RP





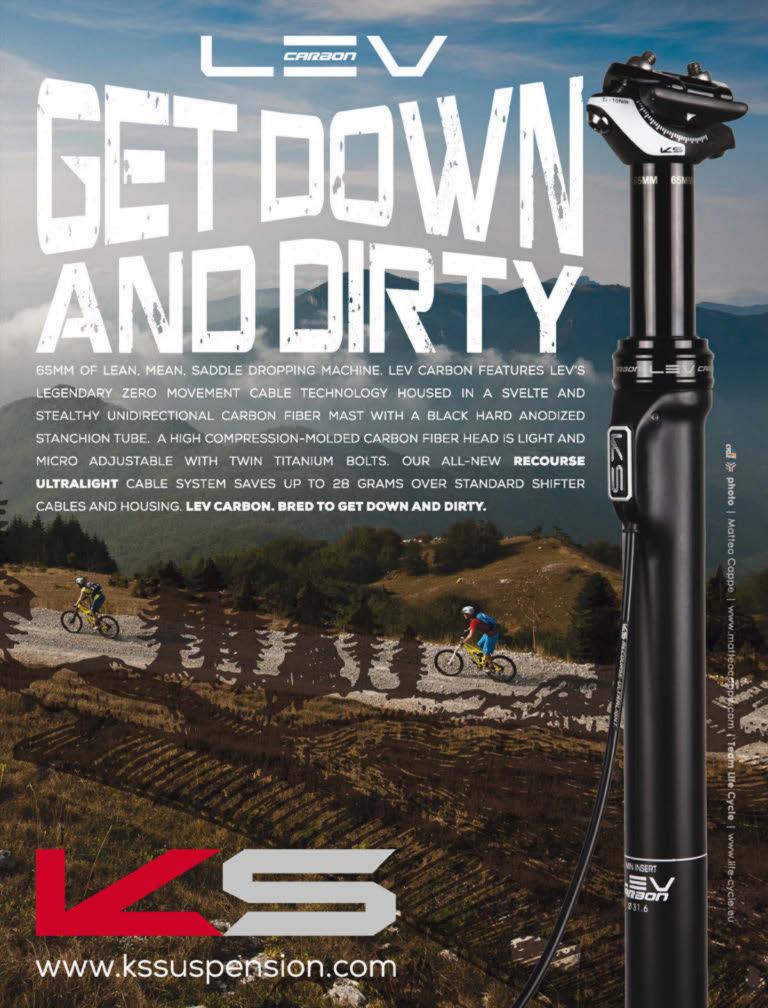
#### TIME HONORED: A DECADE-OLD PAIR OF ATAC Z PEDALS EARNS ITS PRAISE | \$130 (NOW ATAC DH-4)

THE GATE WAS ABOUT TO DROP, AND I WAS LOSING MY BAL-ance. Unable to unclip and catch myself, I flopped like a fish onto dry land just as the gate fell, narrowly missing the racer next to me. As the rest of the teenagers in the moto cranked away, I was left on the start hill for every spectator to watch as I wallowed on the ground and tried to get unclipped. It's a wonder that my history with these pedals didn't end there. The Zs traveled with me to BMX races for years before I threaded them into the cranks of my first mountain bike. They would be battered by my novice pedal timing on the granite-strewn trails of Western Massachusetts, and go on to survive several different bikes and nearly a decade of riding all over New England.

The continuity of components from one bike to the next is something the sentimentalist in me has always been intent on. Unable to tolerate parting with a bike, I've convinced myself that as long as one part from my previous bike—whether it's a headset spacer, a fork or a set of pedals—is moved over to the next that the essence, the ghost of that former bike, will somehow manifest in the latter. On some level, this is less a review and more an apologetic ode to a part whose years of dependable service and transference from bike to bike have guaranteed that I, in fact, am *not* a heartless bastard who brazenly

moves on from one bike to the next. Of course, once I've wrapped all that meaning into these simple machines it hardly feels fair for them to be recognized with little more than a few written words and a spot on a shelf. And while written enshrinement is better compensation than most pedals receive, it still seems to me that the items which dutifully take us on soul-refining adventures deserve considerably more than a toss into the 'spare' bin.

A slight squeak emits from the right pedal when the spindle is flexed under power, and they show the bruises from every time I misjudged the height of a rock. There are even friction burns where the lugs of my shoes contacted the pedals. They're heavy by today's standards, and the platform doesn't provide much benefit in comparison to the pinned bodies on modern downhill pedals, but there is to date no functional reason for the Zs to be retired. There is only my wanton desire to step outside my longtime engagement with these faithful mechanisms and sample some clipless 'strange.' Nostalgia may haunt me every so often and I might even consider myself heartless when I glance at my new pedals, but I can always flip to this memorial and find solace in knowing that I've paid my respects.





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DAKINE Hot Laps 1.5L \$35 | The '80s live, thanks to this hip fanny pack. Features include a side water-bottle holder, breathable air mesh back panel and grippy waist belt. | dakine.com

CLUB RIDE Precinct \$60 | Underarm mesh venting and lightweight, wicking fabric with UVP 20 keep you cool on climbs, as well as protected from the sun. The chest and rear zippered pockets keep your phone safe while reflective accents help keep you safe. | clubrideapparel.com

SPECIALIZED Command Post SRL \$60 | The SRL lever is basically a pared-down SRAM front shifter that Specialized designed to operate its dropper post on 1x bikes. It'll work with other dropper posts as well. | specialized.com

BONTRAGER Flash Charger \$120 |
Air compressors require a motor to
fill their tank. With the Flash Charger,
you're the motor. Pumping fills the
reservoir tank, and releasing the lever
provides a quick burst of air to seat
tubeless beads. | bontrager.com

PRO S-Slide 20 \$25 | The 616-gram S-Slide can fix nearly any mechanical that comes your way with 20 tools that fit a wide variety of components. | pro-bikegear.com

ENDURA Singletrack Lite \$95 | A lightweight short with zipped thigh vents and a durable seat panel. Stash a media player, cash or snack in the zipped back waist pocket. | endurasport.com

BONTRAGER SE3 Team Issue \$75 | This robust tubeless enduro tire is engineered to roll fast without sacrificing strength or grip. | bontrager.com

SKRATCH LABS Cookie Mix \$8.50 |
Cookies aren't just for dessert anymore.
Personalize this mix by adding chocolate chips, fruit and nuts for a nutritionally simpler alternative to prepackaged energy bars. | skratchlabs.com

LEZYNE Micro Floor Drive HVG \$60 | Designed for durability and lighter weight, the aluminum hand pump combines high-volume function with floor-pump power. It has a foot peg,

a quick connect chuck that adapts to Presta or Schrader valves and a psi/ bar pressure gauge. | lezyne.com

ODI/TROY LEE DESIGNS Signature
Series Lock-On \$33 | Behold, a grip
with artistic style and comfort. The
grooved channel prevents mud and
water buildup while the pads and
overmolded flap add protection.
| odigrips.com

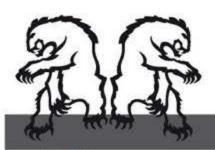
SHIMANO SH-M163 \$150 |
Shimano's Torbal sole provides traction off the bike and offers a wide range of fore-aft cleat adjustment.
The all-condition shoe is stiff enough to retain and transfer power for optimized stability and pedaling.

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